German Migrants in Post-war Britain

An enemy embrace

Inge Weber-Newth and
Johannes-Dieter Steinert

British Politics and Society

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German Migrants in Post-war Britain

Both timely and topical, with 2005 marking the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, this unique book examines the little-known and under-researched area of German migration to Britain in the immediate post-war era. Authors Weber-Newth and Steinert analyse the political framework of post-war immigration and immigrant policy, and the complex decision-making processes that led to large-scale labour migration from the continent. They also consider:

- identity, perception of self and others, stereotypes and prejudices
- migrants' handling of language and intercultural issues
- migrants' attitudes towards National Socialist and contemporary Germany
- migrants' motivations for leaving Germany
- migrants' initial experiences and their reception in Britain recalled after 50 years in the host country.

Based on rich British and German governmental and non-governmental archive sources, contemporary newspaper articles and nearly 80 biographically oriented interviews with German migrants, this outstanding volume, a must-read for students and scholars in the fields of social history and migration studies, expertly encompasses political as well as social-historical questions and engages with the social, economic and cultural situation of German migrants to Britain from a life-historical perspective.

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Introduction

'You have wondered, no doubt, why our soldiers do not smile when you wave your hands, or say "Good morning" in the streets, or play with the children. It is because our soldiers are obeying orders. You do not like it. Nor do our soldiers. We are a naturally friendly and forgiving people. But the orders are necessary; and I will tell you why.'[1] In June 1945, when Field Marshal Montgomery started his public explanation of the non-fraternisation order in British-occupied Germany with this statement, hardly anyone could have imagined that just a few years later Britain would witness a large-scale immigration of Germans that is without parallel in history. By 1951, a total of almost 60,000 Germans had come to Britain, either temporarily or permanently. Within this group there were approximately 10,000 war brides and around 35,000 female workers. These were recruited either by government, employment agencies or recruited privately, mainly for the health system, domestic service and the textile industry, respectively. Furthermore, there were about 15,000 ex-prisoners of war who were allowed to stay as civilian workers. Among them was Bernd Trautmann, who later became famous as 'Traut the Kraut' at Manchester City Football Club.

German migration to post-war Britain differed from pre-First World War patterns in two key respects: Migrants were widely dispersed throughout the country, and did not establish ethnically orientated associations. In comparison, in 1911 more than half the 53,324 Germans lived in and around London.[2] Their economic backgrounds ranged from wealthy bankers and traders, to craftsmen and white-collar workers, general labourers and finally the poor in London's East End. They organised themselves according to their social and financial circumstances in exclusive clubs with economic, political, cultural, social and sporting aims, in associations of craftsmen, and in philanthropic organisations that tried to reduce the misery of their fellow countrymen.[3] A German hospital, an old people's home and an orphanage, together with schools and churches in many British cities were visible expressions of the richer Germans' activities.

The internment of about 30,000 Enemy Aliens, mainly on the Isle of Man, during the First World War stopped these activities.[4] In August and October 1914, the first disturbances and riots against Germans occurred in several cities. Anti-German feelings peaked in April 1915 after the Lusitania was sunk.[5] German labourers and white-collar workers were dismissed, and German shops boycotted. British associations, organisations and clubs severed links with their German members.[6] German organisations stopped their activities. Once the war ended, large-scale expulsions that affected some 19,000 Germans began.[7] Others left the country of their own accord or tried to hide their ethnic origins.

As a result, the 1931 census recorded only 28,048 German-born residents in England and Wales, and a further 1,154 in Scotland.[8] According to the Aliens Restriction Act of 1919 and the Aliens Order of 1920, foreign labour could only be employed in areas of the labour market suffering serious shortages, which before 1939 applied only to domestic service.[9] In 1938, the 'accelerated return' of some 15,000 German and Austrian women employed in British households was demanded by the Nazi government.[10] The official

reason given for this was a lack of domestic help in Germany, but as a German official noted: 'Many German girls did not shy away from working in Jewish households', and this he regarded as being incompatible with the German *Ansehen*.[11]

There was some movement of Germans and Austrians from the continent into Britain during the inter-war years, however, the majority of those coming to Britain after 1933 were refugees. By the beginning of the Second World War, their number had reached 73,000 and by 1945, the total had grown to around 200,000.[12] During the Second World War there was no repeat of the anti-German violence, but the Isle of Man was once again filled with Enemy Aliens. The 1951 census recorded 96,000 German-born residents in Britain, which was already higher than the previous peak recorded in 1911. In the light of British post-war migration policy, this is hardly surprising, and the trend continued. In 1961 there were over 120,000 Germans resident in Britain. This figure grew to more than 215,000 in 1991, and over 250,000 by 2001.

Research context

Post-war migration from mainland Europe to Britain has not received much academic attention. Apart from some older essays[13] and monographs, among them J.A.Tannahill's pioneering study, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain,* academic interest has mainly focused on migration and migrants from Commonwealth countries. As a consequence, European migrants have been marginalised as objects of study while at the same time being sometimes idealised as a group.[14] A further piece of academic research on the European Volunteer Workers was published at the beginning of the 1990s by Diana Kay and Robert Miles. They focussed on the political aspects of their reception, conditions of employment, welfare issues and the way the migrants were perceived in broader social and political terms.[15] David Cesarani's publication, *Justice Delayed,* must also be mentioned in this context. It concentrates on an important aspect of post-war migration from Europe: war criminals who were able to settle in Britain, despite stringent security checks.

In addition, there is a small body of academic work that deals with Germans in post-war Britain. Three separate monographs, authored by Henry Faulk, Matthew Barry Sullivan and Helmut Wolff, focus specifically on the topic of German prisoners of war (POWs) in Britain. However, these publications also outline briefly the resettlement of the 15,000 ex-POWs, and are thus important sources for analysing the years prior to 1948.[16] Aspects of British post-war policy regarding German migrants have also been analysed by Johannes-Dieter Steinert in his study, *Migration und Politik,* and Steinert and Lothar Kettenacker have both contributed to a general survey of the theme in the volume *Germans in Britain since* 1500, edited by Panikos Panayi.

A socio-historical analysis of German post-war migration has not hitherto been published. Nor have others taken up the challenge identified by Colin Holmes. Formulated against the background of xenophobia, violence and hostilities against migrants from Africa, the Indian subcontinent and the West Indies in Britain in 1988, he states: 'Little is known, however, about the construction of the images of Europeans which emerged against this background; in popular parlance "the wogs began at Calais"

and near at home across the Irish Seas, but the nature of the European groups, or indeed their durability and influence, still remain largely unknown and little remarked upon.'[17]

Research questions

This study is an interdisciplinary contribution to the field of migration research. It encompasses historical as well as sociological research questions. It engages with the social, economic and cultural circumstances of the German migrants in Britain from the end of the war right up to the present day from a life-history perspective. The perception of self and others, stereotypes and prejudices are analysed, together with social expectations and role attributions. 'Gender' is used as an analytic category.

Politics dominates the first two chapters of this study, as the process of political decision-making that led to German POWs settling in Britain and German workers being recruited to work in Britain is examined. We also consider the question of whether, and to what extent, British 'immigration policy' was accompanied by an 'immigrant policy'. The latter will be seen as an area in which the government attempted to create an environment to aid interaction between locals and migrants as well as assimilation. In contemporary interpretations, assimilation was directed at both parties: the host country and the migrants. In concrete terms this included, for example, informing the British public in detail about the foreign workers, and vice versa. For the migrants there were also welfare schemes, support for language acquisition and programmes to facilitate the transmission of the British way of life. In this way, the government co-opted the support of numerous NGOs who were supposed to adopt a bridging role between locals and newcomers.

The migrants' motives, expectations, aspirations and daily life and work experiences during their first years in Britain are examined with reference to the political, economic and social conditions in post-war Germany. In this context, the question arises as to what extent the stereotypes of the war years continued to affect the migrants. Conflict was to be expected, not only in the interaction between Germans and Britons, but also between Britons and other foreign workers, between Germans and other foreigners, between different groups of European migrants, and between those from the Commonwealth. We hypothesise that it was interaction with their new environment, as well as with different groups of foreigners with contrasting attitudes, that influenced the migrants' self-perceptions and affected their attitudes and behaviour.

Finally, the social, economic and—in a wider sense—cultural positions of those Germans who settled in Britain, constitute the major themes of our analysis. The different forms and directions of the perceptions of self and others will be analysed afresh from the perspective of half a century later. We will examine how migrants came to terms with their specific situations, and how they underwent a process of acculturation that Friedrich Heckmann defines as 'the change of values, norms and attitudes [...] as well as life-styles stimulated by cultural contact'.[18] The areas of work and every-day life, relations with spouse and family, and language and traditions will be investigated, along with associated problems and conflicts, and gender specific-coping strategies. There will also be an examination of how migrants coped when forced to confront the National Socialist past, something that many of those interviewed—and even their children—experienced.

The study is divided into six chapters. After briefly outlining the political, economic and demographic circumstances in Britain and Germany after the war, we then focus on British immigration and immigrant policies. Following this, individual migrant groups' experiences during their first few years in Britain are analysed according to the above-mentioned research questions. In Chapter 4, welfare initiatives undertaken on national, community and factory levels are discussed, including the activities of British and German NGOs and churches. Chapter 5 is devoted to migrants' personal experiences, and how they see things 50 years on. Finally, Chapter 6 comprises summaries of five individual life-stories of migrants who settled in Britain.

Sources and methods

The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. It combines an analysis of archival sources, reports and studies, newspaper articles, and narrative biographical interviews.

Written sources include official government files held in the Public Record Office in London and the German Bundesarchiv in Koblenz. In addition, unpublished autobiographical accounts and other collections held in the Imperial War Museum, London, and the Militärarchiv, Freiburg, were traced. Archival sources generally favour research on political history. 'The more personal, local, and unofficial a document, the less likely it was to survive', Paul Thomson noted in his much-acclaimed book, *The Voice of the Past.*[19] This means, for example, that plenty of information remains available in the PRO about the political decision-making process that led to the settlement of German POWs and the recruitment of German workers, while, with few exceptions, most files concerning regional or community administration have been destroyed.

A similar situation exists in the archives of the NGOs that were involved in welfare programmes. It is mainly documents that deal with the history of the particular organisation and its main activities that have survived. This is also true of the British Red Cross Archive and the Church of England Record Centre. The latter holds documents of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland that contain information on prisoners of war, race relations and foreign workers. In addition, we looked at the papers of Bishop Bell (Chichester) and Archbishop Fisher (Canterbury) in Lambeth Palace. In Germany, two archives dealing with church issues were of particular significance: the Archiv der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte in Bonn (a Catholic institution), and the Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin (for Protestants). Both hold reports and written correspondence on the problems that migrants from Germany encountered during their first years in Britain. Letters to and from POWs and recruited women, as well as a number of reports and minutes, were also found in German church communities around Britain.[20]

Furthermore, we were able to examine the bulletins and minutes of the German Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in London, as well as some documents from the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), along with the papers of Victor Gollancz and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) collection held in the Modern Record Office at the University of Warwick. There is also an extensive TUC collection, with its wealth of brochures and pamphlets, at London Metropolitan University. In addition, the Archive of the German Caritas Association (Deutscher Caritasverband) in Freiburg was

particularly useful. This archive contains files from the German National Federation of Catholic Associations for the Protection of Young Women (Deutscher Nationalverband katholischer Mädchenschutzvereine), which sent its own social worker to northwest England and also operated the St Lioba Home in London for decades. Finally, research visits to the archives of the World-YMCA (Alliance Universelle des Unions Chrétiennes de Jeunes Gens) and to the Comité International de la Croix-Rouge in Geneva were made, the latter having only recently opened its archives for research purposes. Unfortunately we were unable to visit two major British NGOs—the Women's Royal Voluntary Services (WRVS) and the English YMCA—whose archives were closed while we were researching.

Several county and local archives in the textile area of northwest England deserve a mention. These contained the files of departments and committees for welfare, health and education, and also of trade unions, chambers of commerce and churches, which proved particularly interesting. The Greater Manchester Police Museum offered a rare and valuable source: the Alien Register from Salford district. It seems that the retention policies of local and county archives closely resemble those of national archives. That is, it is mainly sources on political history and the key activities of some associations and trade unions that have been deemed worthy of keeping (predominantly minutes and accountancy records). Local and regional newspapers covering the period 1946–52 proved to be further valuable sources for this study.

Some oral history projects carried out in northwest England were also significant. The largest of the collections used in this study is located in the Central Library in Bradford. We evaluated about 250 interviews from its *European Immigration* and *Textile Community* projects for this study. The interviewees were former Displaced Persons, mainly from the Ukraine and the Baltic States, but they also include former members of the Polish army, other foreign labourers and British textile workers. A much smaller number of similar sources were available in Stalybridge and Huddersfield. These interviews enabled us to compare the life experiences of different groups of migrants who entered Britain at the same time. They also provided information on the reactions of British workers towards their foreign colleagues.

Finally, the study draws heavily on 62 narrative biographical interviews carried out between 1995 and 1997 with post-war migrants who remained in Britain. The group comprises 20 ex-POWs, 14 war brides, 10 women recruited under the North Sea scheme (including 2 student nurses), 6 domestic helpers recruited privately, 3 ethnic Germans and 9 Germans from the Sudetenland recruited under Westward Ho as European Volunteer Workers. In addition, we recorded two group-interviews and several interviews with former Displaced Persons, British spouses, welfare workers, members of the clergy and nuns, bringing the total number of interviewees to over 80. In geographical terms, the interviews were concentrated in Greater London, the textile regions in the northwest of England, Edinburgh and the Scottish Highlands. In this way we attempted to achieve a balance between city and country, centre and periphery, industrial and agrarian life-styles, and North and South.

Most interviewees were born in the 1920s and were about 70 years of age at the time they were interviewed. The interviews usually lasted between two and five hours. The search for interviewees involved the German churches, who forwarded our requests or invited us to their meetings. The German Welfare Council (Deutscher Sozialausschuß) in

London was also very helpful, as were their regular German senior citizen meetings (Seniorenkreis). Over time a sort of 'snowball effect' developed, with existing contacts putting us in touch with fresh ones. To avoid bias and too narrow a representation, we tried to interview people who were not too closely linked to the above-mentioned institutions.

We wanted the interviews primarily to be opportunities for telling life stories, and to be carried out in an open form[21] with the interviewer very much in the background. A semi-structured questionnaire served as an interview guide to ensure we gathered insights and information on some of the following themes: national origins, motives for migration, first impressions of Britain, experiences at work, choices of partner, starting family life, children, traditions and customs, possible plans to return home, naturalisation, stereotypes and hostilities. The order of topics was flexible. Ideally, it was set by the interviewee who did not know the themes we were attempting to cover in detail. Most interviewees touched upon each topic without much prompting. The interviewer only directed the conversation when there was a danger of the interview straying too far away from the set themes. In general, we aimed at non-interference during the interview so as not to influence or distort the narratives. Ideally, questions to cover topics that had been missed by the interviewee were asked when they had finished their narrative. This form of interview was welcomed by most of the respondents. For many it was a rare opportunity to talk in detail about their lives and experiences. Perhaps it was an advantage that the interviewers were about the same age as many of the respondents' own children, and, in contrast, were intensely interested in the 'old stories'. Occasionally, a strong rapport developed and an interviewee would open up about quite painful experiences. But also, in some cases the past was regarded as too hard to talk about. Sometimes an interview request was refused on the basis that it would bring back too many unpleasant memories.

The interviews could be regarded as a thematisation of subjective perception and experience.[22] However, a degree of commonality became apparent, which allowed us to reach some general conclusions. These derived from a degree of homogeneity, the result of belonging to a similar age group, undergoing a similar cultural and political socialisation process in their country of origin, and sharing experiences of war, flight and expulsion. Nearly all, with the exception of the war brides, were recruited as labourers. Heterogeneous elements were also present, such as certain cultural differences resulting from diverse regional origins despite the possible presence of a common nationality. There were also gender-specific expectations and experiences, diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and differences in educational standards and training.

The interviews added significantly to information gathered from written documents, in that the different sources—archival, newspaper articles and interviews—not only complemented and supported each other, but also offered an opportunity for corroboration. Thus the diversity of research methods used ranged from traditional interpretation of source material, to quantifications and oral histories. Although the latter is as old as history itself, it remains controversial as the considerable body of literature on the topic shows. According to Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, the relationship between memory and history and between past and present lies at the heart of the debate, and may never be fully resolved.[23] Irrespective of its origin every source has to be judged critically, and results or hypotheses have to be compared with other sources and

interpretations. All sources inevitably contain, to some degree, the personal biases of those who produced them but it is not always obvious whether or not they were conscious of doing this, and whether we as readers will recognise it. For social scientists facing this dilemma, Paul Thomson's words are reassuring 'Every historical source derived from human perception is subjective.'[24] It is worth bearing in mind that we usually do not know how sources discovered in archives were produced or developed, and we hardly ever know who the authors were or what their backgrounds were. In contrast to this, we got to know a little about our respondents—and their subjectivities—during the course of the interviews. The decisive factors in judging any source will always be the interpretation of it, and the assessment of its significance within the context of the argument.

1
Britain and West Germany in the post-war period

On 5 July 1945, the Conservative Party led by Winston Churchill suffered a resounding defeat at the hands of the British electorate. Clement Attlee became the new Prime Minister on 27 July. His government, which remained in power until 1951, is usually associated with policies such as the nationalisation of industry, expanding the welfare state and further peaceful withdrawal from empire. It is seldom remembered for instigating an inward movement of roughly 1 million people from continental Europe, Ireland, the dominions and colonies.[1] If the subject of migration is mentioned at all in relevant surveys of the Attlee era, references are usually limited to the *Empire Windrush,* the former German cruise liner[2] that arrived from the West Indies in 1948 with almost 500 immigrants on board.

The 1945 general election took place whilst Britain was still at war. Although a cease fire existed throughout Europe following the unconditional surrender of the German Reich, fighting continued in the Pacific against Japan. High expectations accompanied the 1945 elections: of lasting peace and a New Jerusalem, of greater social justice and full employment. People anticipated better wages and housing, more to spend their money on, for improved educational opportunities and an end to the barriers of the class system. They looked forward to an efficient and stable welfare system with effective cover for the sick and elderly. In a superhuman effort the country, aided by its dominions and colonies, and the USA, had successfully managed to overcome the military threat posed by Nazi Germany. In this struggle the British public made an incalculable contribution to the defeat of dictatorship and violence. Following the efforts and privations of war, voters were demanding an alternative to the desolate economic conditions of the 1920s and 1930s, and a share in the future prosperity of the country.

Demand for labour in Britain

This huge effort coming as it did so soon after the First World War had drained the country's resources. When victory was finally achieved, gold and currency reserves had been exhausted, as had the once considerable stock of foreign assets. Foreign debt had risen to a total of £3.355 billion: £2.723 billion of this sum was owed within the Sterling Area and £632 million to the USA. In the global post-war economy, it was difficult to generate income from abroad through financial services, capital investment and currency trading, which made matters worse. In addition, commercial shipping capacity was limited due to extensive losses during the war and the demands of the military, and this constrained exports and depressed the balance of payments still further. In 1945, exports

totalled £399 million whilst imports were valued at £1.053 billion.[3] The consequences of this deficit and American trade and credit policies created a shortage of hard foreign currency, the so-called dollar gap. Rising national debt, the shortage of dollars, the energy crisis of the winter of 1946–47, and Britain's continuing foreign military and humanitarian responsibilities (in occupied Germany, for example) all contributed to the development of an economic policy that was characterised by a high degree of centralised control and planning. In simplest terms the formula was: reduce imports and expand exports.

A concentrated group of traditional industries, such as mining, iron, steel and textiles, were in an ideal position to rapidly increase exports, both directly and indirectly. According to the government and domestic industrialists at the time, by the late 1940s expansion of these old industries had created a growing labour shortage in these vital industries. It was this that eventually forced the state to recruit foreign workers from the European mainland. The same situation applied to agriculture which had benefited during the war and immediately after from the large numbers of Italian and German POWs who were sent to work on the land. These workers were later joined by Displaced Persons recruited in Europe. The aim here was to reduce imports of agricultural produce that were mainly paid for in hard currency and, at the same time, to save precious dollars. Agriculture, mining and the textile industries enjoyed their new status acting to redress the balance of trade and payments deficit and the attention they received from state economic and industrial planners. These were *undermanned industries,* largely because of the unappealing nature of the work and their inability to shake off the negative image they had earned, mainly during the inter-war years, as being prone to crises and unemployment. Furthermore, due to the scarcity of capital investment in the first decade after the war, little had been done to automate these industries which in turn limited the potential for any meaningful rise in productivity. This deficit could only be dealt with by expanding the workforce—with the help of foreign labour if necessary.

Despite massive advertising at home and recruitment abroad, the appeal and image of the agriculture and fishing industries remained low, and the number of people employed in these sectors only rose from 1.041 million in June 1945 to 1.178 million at the end of 1948 (1939:950,000). In coal mining the figures rose from 738,000 to 788,000 (1939:773,000). In the textile industry, where production during the war had been severely restricted, the number of employees was estimated to be approximately 500,000 in mid-1945, rising to 971,000 by the end of 1948 (1939:798,000).[4] These figures illustrate the fact that there was still a real need for the government to intervene and redirect the workforce, a practice initially developed during the war. In June 1945, the Control of Engagement Order continued to stipulate that all men under 50 and women under 40 could only be placed in employment by the labour exchanges.[5] Although the order was soon revised, some restrictions on changing jobs in the mining or agricultural sectors remained in place until 1950. However, the Essential Work Orders were rarely strictly applied. The Ministry of Labour and the labour exchanges relied much on persuasion when advising the workforce. As T.Wilson observed in 1952, this was something workers tended to accept as 'they knew that in the end they could be directed'.[6]

A further key political objective was to readjust the economy from wartime to peacetime production. The armed forces were to be reduced and ex-servicemen re-

integrated into working life. In marked contrast to events following the First World War, both processes functioned unexpectedly well. Even the high degree of demobilisation failed to produce a particularly noticeable rise in national unemployment figures. Between June 1945 and December 1946, the number of people in the armed forces fell from 5.09 to 1.46 million, whilst during the same period numbers employed in the supply services also fell from 3.83 to 0.46 million.[7] At the end of 1948, Britain still retained an army of 810,000 soldiers.

Furthermore, between July 1945 and July 1946, over one million people actually left the work force. This group was mainly made up of women who, having made their contribution to the war effort, were redeployed within the framework of redirected labour.[8] In 1943 there were 7.75 million women in paid employment, but even at this early stage the government was fearful of a post-war labour shortage and was at pains to keep as many women as possible in the job market—initially with little success. The number of women in paid employment fell to approximately six million, before a turning point was reached in June 1947. Between 1947 and 1950, the number of women at work rose by almost a million, and by 1961, the total was 8.4 million, a figure well ahead of the 1943 total.[9]

In the late 1940s, getting women to return to work or enter employment for the first time was supported by extensive advertising campaigns. Here the intention was to direct women specifically towards the traditional female-dominated occupations such as the textile industry. Independent of the government's efforts, at the same time, women were being marginalised in other sectors such as the electronics industry.[10] Also, government policy itself was prone to contradictions during this period. As part of the general economic policy, regulations governing the workforce[11] (that until approximately 1947 had been highly thought of) were designed to increase the number of women in paid employment. But there were some government departments which cast worried eyes over an anticipated fall in the birth rate and predicted a fall in the British population of 4 million by the year 2035.[12]

In addition, the job market lost all those who had reached retiring age or who simply did not need to work. Weekly working hours, increased during the war, were now reduced to pre-war levels, which also increased labour shortages.[13] Raising the school leaving age to 15 denied the job market of some 370,000 boys and girls for an extra year.[14] In total, the number of people in civilian employment rose, between June 1945 and the end of 1946, from 12.6 to 17.35 million (at the end of 1948:19.15 million). Due to the combination of full employment and labour shortages, unemployment figures for the six-year term of the Labour government remained extremely low at under 3 per cent. Only for a short period in early 1947 did the number rise above 2 million. This was due to the exceptionally hard winter and the enormous difficulties supplying coal to key industries (the fuel crisis). This harmed those reliant on exports, such as iron and steel, as much as those involved in domestic reconstruction.[15]

The year 1947 marked not only an economic turning point, but also a decisive political moment in the history of both Britain and Europe. The tensions that developed into the Cold War were becoming apparent. It was evident in the Truman Doctrine, for instance, and in the Marshall Plan, from which Britain greatly profited. Furthermore, under pressure from the USA, Britain signed the GATT agreement. This put restrictions on trade and tariff concessions that had existed amongst all the Commonwealth countries.

The USA also insisted on the free convertibility of the pound, which produced an immediate rise in inflation and jeopardised hard won currency reserves. After only four weeks the decision was revised. The year 1947 was also the year India gained independence and, more importantly within the context of this particular study, the year marking the start of the recruitment of a foreign work force among Displaced Persons on the continent.

In the early post-war years Britain pursued an active immigration and foreign labour policy. Together with the re-distribution of the workforce, this made an important contribution to economic reconstruction. The state recruited foreign workers, in particular to fill the less attractive vacancies in the undermanned industries that were so vital to exports. British workers often shunned these jobs because of the low wages, dirty working conditions, physical demands or the health risks associated with them. Men were needed for the mines and women for the textile industry and health services, particularly following the creation of the National Health Service in 1948. In addition there was the traditionally female-dominated domestic service industry, which ever fewer local women were prepared to enter. According to the censuses, the total number of domestic servants in England and Wales fell between 1931 and 1951 from over 1.3 million to some 723,000. Ten years later the figure was only 200,000. Attempts by the state to reverse this trend, by such measures as founding the Institute of Houseworkers in 1947, had little effect.[16] Foreign workers were also needed in the construction industry and in agriculture where efforts were being made to reduce imports and improve domestic supply. In this area of the economy, wartime restructuring, the extension of gang labour systems and the creation of regional labour pools (consisting of Irish workers, POWs and the Women's Land Army, amongst others), had all led to the decline of the farm hand as an occupation.[17] It was often cheaper for the farmer to pay by the hour than employ someone full time.

In addition to all this, in 1945, as D.K.Britton so memorably put it, the war against hunger had yet to be won. Five years after the war had ended the supply of basic foodstuffs was still not as secure as it had been before the war, despite the fact that considerably more land was now under the plough than in earlier years, and the balance between arable land and pasture had shifted. In terms of nutritional guidelines, in 1949–50, Britain was capable of producing only 39 per cent of the recommended daily intake of calories per head of population, and 53 per cent of the protein and 34 per cent of the fat requirements. In 1939, with 3 million fewer inhabitants, Britain had produced 30, 44 and 31 per cent of these foodstuffs, respectively. The forced mechanisation of agriculture, made necessary by the war but continued once it ended, was partly responsible for this rise in productivity. In April 1944, there were 173,000 tractors in use on the farms. By 1950, there were 332,000. During the same period, the number of milking machines in operation rose from 38,000 to 79,000, while the size of the work force employed on the land grew from 572,000 in June 1945 to a peak of 645,000 in June 1949.[18]

But despite these efforts Britain remained dependent upon imported foodstuffs to feed itself, and this eroded vital currency reserves. At the same time, to meet its humanitarian commitments, Britain also had to provide for the populations in her zones of occupation in Germany and Austria. This strained currency reserves still further. For this reason, some foodstuffs and consumer goods were rationed in Britain far longer than they were in West Germany where rationing was brought to an end as part of the 1948 currency

reform. But the end of rationing in Germany certainly meant only hunger and privation for some sections of the community and by no means contributed to social harmony. In contrast, the British government's decision to continue rationing at home at least guaranteed *everyone* limited access to certain foodstuffs and a few basic consumer goods, and meant nobody had to starve. In June 1946, for example, following worrying forecasts for global harvests and fears of possible famine in Germany and parts of Asia (where Britain had responsibilities in India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya and Singapore), the government imposed bread rationing. This was something that had not even been necessary during the war, and despite a storm of protest, the measure remained in place until July 1948. A sharp reduction in rationing followed in 1949 when such goods as sweets, chocolates and later clothing went on unrestricted sale. In 1952, restrictions on the sale of tea were lifted, and finally meat followed in 1954.[19]

Nevertheless, Britain remained attractive to migrants, and not only those from war-torn Europe. In 1950, its inhabitants were still healthier than those of any other European country apart from Switzerland, and the standard of living in Britain was ranked fifth highest in the world. During the next four decades, the British economy grew faster than at any time in its history. In 1989, the standard of living was twice what it had been in 1950, although in world terms Britain had slipped to twelfth.[20] But in combination with these pull-factors, there were also certain push-factors that affected immigration patterns. These included the political, demographic and economic situation in Europe.

Legacy of the Nazi era

On 8 May 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally. Its former eastern territories, the areas beyond the rivers Oder and Neisse, were put under Soviet control, whilst the rest of the country was divided into four zones of occupation. Great expanses lay in ruins, and shortages in basic necessities such as housing, building materials, fuel, clothing and food dictated everyday life. Until 1948, people who relied solely upon their ration cards had to tighten their belts and exist on around 1,500 calories (and sometimes even less than 1,000 calories a day). In 1936, the average daily intake had been 3,100 calories.[21] Home-grown produce helped bridge the gap, as did the black market and smuggling. Those who worked for the military governments, especially the British or American, had less to worry about when it came to food. These people were therefore openly or secretly envied as much as those who had more personal contacts. These intimate relationships did not always end happily with a war bride joining her husband in Birmingham or Leicester, and pregnancy and desperation in Hamburg or Osnabrück was more likely. For some foreign visitors, such as Angela Limerick of the British Red Cross Society, it was incredible that people could exist in such a ruined landscape at all. In November 1945 and October 1946, she inspected the Society's relief teams in the British zone. She also visited the bunkers, Displaced Persons and German refugees.[22]

The plight of both these groups was a result of the Nazi era and its military aggression. *Displaced Persons* (DPs) was the collective name given to a group of United Nations nationals. They consisted mainly of former slave labourers, but also included wartime refugees from Eastern Europe and the few survivors of the Shoah. According to a conservative estimate made by Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, the number of DPs living in the

German Reich, Austria, France, Belgium and the Netherlands at the end of the war was at least 10.8 million. Many of them made their own way back to their homes and native countries. Others were repatriated with the help of the allies and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which, in the case of Soviet citizens, often meant forced repatriation. By late September 1945, the number of recorded repatriations from the three western zones of occupied Germany had reached 4.6 million. In October 1945, repatriation activities were halted for the winter, which left 1.2 million DPs remaining in the three zones. In 1946, it became apparent that many DPs did not wish to be repatriated because they were anxious about the political change, possible discrimination, deportation and labour camps in their former homelands in eastern Europe. As a result, only around 500,000 repatriations were recorded for 1946. At the end of that year, there were still almost 915,000 DPs present in the three western zones of occupation, some 325,000 in the British zone, and 550,000 in the American zone.[23]

An alternative solution had to be found for those remaining. International interest began to focus on the possibility of migration to a third country. In view of the worldwide shortage of labour, countries with a tradition of more open immigration found it relatively easy, in political terms, to accept these migrants, especially because recruitment could be carried out cheaply and directly in the camps. Part of the logistical burden, including transport, was shouldered by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), an organisation specifically created for this purpose that had its own ships. Between 1 July 1947 and 31 December 1951, commissions from target countries helped by the IRO recruited over 700,000 DPs from the western zones of Germany. A further 300,000 DPs from other western European countries including Austria, Italy, Belgium and France, joined them.[24] Most travelled overseas to start afresh in the USA, Canada, Australia or South America.

The number of German and ex-patriot ethnic German refugees was even greater than the number of DPs.[25] Their forced expulsions can be roughly divided into three phases: Fleeing from the Red Army in 1944, the disorganised and wildcat expulsions that took place between May and July 1945, and finally, the internationally agreed evictions from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary following the Potsdam Conference (where Clement Attlee, as Britain's new Prime Minister, first replaced Winston Churchill on the world stage). In 1950, there were a total of 12.45 million refugees living in the two German states. The biggest group consisted of roughly 7 million people who had come from the former Reich's eastern territories. There were an additional 3 million who had come from Czechoslovakia, and 1.4 million from Poland.[26] East Germany had to take the highest number of refugees, both in terms of number and percentage of the population. In 1947, there were 4.4 million in the Soviet zone, which constituted 24.3 per cent of the local population. In the American zone there were 3 million (17.7 per cent), in the British zone 3.3 million (14.5 per cent) and in the French zone, 60,000 (1 per cent).[27]

Wherever possible, refugees within each zone were first directed to the more rural areas that had suffered less wartime destruction. But since the refugees were by no means welcome everywhere, some began to consider emigration. The everyday competition for scarce food, living space, clothes—and eventually work—gave rise to conflicts. Rather than living in the much maligned camps, refugees were sometimes billeted in private households. In these situations, where people—often strangers—were forced to live in such close proximity to one another, only able to get to one's room by going through that

of someone else's, for example, nerves became frayed and tempers were often lost in the shared kitchen or bathroom.

The rural areas in which the refugees congregated offered few and limited career prospects. Moving further afield, either within Germany or abroad, proved to be an attractive alternative once the initial restrictions on personal movement, place of residence and employment were lifted. There was a shortage of workers in West Germany until the currency reform; the official figures suggest low unemployment and a high number of job vacancies. But these figures bear closer scrutiny. Not all job seekers, by a long way, actually registered at the labour exchanges. Many feared being forced into inappropriate work, whilst others were reluctant to apply for unemployment benefit which was meagre and, until the currency reform, paid in worthless currency that bought virtually nothing. It was only after the currency reform in 1948 that West German unemployment figures became reliable and the true extent of the problem was mercilessly revealed. Now it became important to seek paid employment, and with unemployment benefits now being paid in Deutsche Mark (DM), those seeking work could ill afford not to register at the labour exchanges. Small reserves of money that had existed in the immediate post-war years had now been exhausted. Rising prices forced many women, who may not have previously worked, into employment. This applied to other family members too, whilst those who had previously been self-employed often lost their businesses through a lack of capital.[28]

Local residents and refugees competed for jobs and apprenticeships. The losers often had to accept years of poorly paid employment in work they were not necessarily suited to. Between 1948 and 1949, the annual average number of people officially registered unemployed doubled, and amongst these were a disproportionately large number of refugees. In February 1949, for the first time in the post-war period, labour exchanges registered over 1 million people unemployed. This figure continued to grow, monthly, until it reached 1.9 million in February 1950. It was only in August 1953 that figures dipped below the 1 million level for a brief three months period.[29] The subsequent rapid economic progress of West Germany is often referred to as an economic miracle, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s that was a long way off. Although the Marshall Plan and currency reform supported economic reconstruction, it was the start of the Korean War in 1950 that provided the real turning point. At that time, the Federal Republic of Germany was the only industrialised Western nation with a production capacity that was free of obstructions.[30] Not only did the German economy take advantage of this opportunity in the short term, it also managed to protect the position it had achieved, raising exports and gross national product in the long term.

The remarkable improvement in the German economy, from 1952 to 1953 on, was soon reflected in the unemployment figures and, in short order, the numbers of people emigrating. To leave Germany in the post-war period one needed an exit permit and also an entry visa from the country one intended to visit. But most European countries were initially restrictive when dealing with applications from former enemy nationals, as were many other countries. The strict regulations applied by the allies to issuing exit permits compounded the difficulty. A relaxation of the rules came about as the result of labour shortages that relevant authorities felt could not, or should not, be resolved through the use of other migrant groups. In western Europe, within the context of accepting DPs, Britain and France led the way by recruiting ethnic German refugees. It was not long

before Canada and the USA followed. According to official German figures (some of which are estimates), 779,700 Germans emigrated overseas between 1946 and 1961.[31]

The year 1950 marked a turning point in post-war German emigration. In that year the chances of migration to another country within Europe, which until then had been modest, ceased to be a problem because it was suddenly much easier to be accepted by other countries. Despite the large number of people leaving, by no means did West Germany have the highest number of emigrants in Europe. In this respect, Britain dominates the figures: during the period of state-organised foreign recruitment alone (i.e. from 1946 to 1950), 720,000 people left her shores. The majority of these were relatively highly qualified.[32] Obviously Winston Churchill's appeal in 1945 for people to desist from emigration and put all their energy into reconstruction efforts had had little effect on them.[33] The British job market missed these emigrants, and their departure increased the demand for foreign labour.

Migration to Britain

Between 1945 and 1951, a total of approximately one million people migrated to Britain. The largest groups within this figure were British subjects from the dominions (319,000) and the colonies (88,000).[34] A further 100,000–150,000 Irish came to work in Britain, as did some 173,000 foreign workers who had been issued with labour permits of limited duration. Of these, 31,000 were German.[35] State recruitment of DPs was carried out under the Balt Cygnet and Westward Ho programmes, and a total of 76,987 workers were recruited through them (57,104 men and 19,883 women). A further 3,824 family members accompanied the workers (268 men, 1,696 women and 1,860 children).[36] Amongst those recruited were 1,378 ethnic Germans from eastern European countries (744 men, 634 women). There were also 1,304 ethnic German women from the Sudetenland who, like all the DPs, received unrestricted residency permits.[37] This also applied to the 115,000 or so Polish soldiers and their families, the 15,000 German and 1,100 Italian ex-POWs, and finally to the 8,000 or more members of the Ukrainian SS, who arrived as prisoners of war from Italy in 1947. In contrast, the 9,713 German women recruited through the North Sea scheme had their work and residency permits restricted to a specific duration. They found employment mainly in the health sector or as domestic workers.[38]

Amongst the migrants were almost 60,000 Germans, and these are the focus of this study. They comprised 15,000 ex-prisoners of war who remained in Britain, the 1,378 ethnic Germans and 1,304 German women from the Sudetenland who arrived under the Westward Ho programme, approximately 10,000 female workers recruited by the state under the North Sea scheme, a further 20,000 women who were placed in British households as domestic workers, either privately or through agencies, and finally, the estimated 10,000 war brides. This latter group consisted of both men and women who had married an active or demobilised soldier, or a civilian member of the Control Commission in Germany in the immediate post-war years. It is now impossible to give the exact figure, but estimates suggest that between 1947 and 1951, a total of 7,342 British soldiers stationed in Germany applied for permission to marry a German woman. Further indicators can be found in the visas issued between 1946 and 1951; 289 German

men entered Britain because they were married to a British woman, and 9,115 Germans (mainly women) received visas to travel because they intended to marry a British citizen.[39]

Germany and the Germans

'Krauts. In Britain the image of Germans is getting worse. The governments like each other, but unfortunately the individual populations do not.' This is how Jürgen Krönig began an article published in the German weekly *Die Zeit* in September 1999. He went on to discuss a particular cultural issue: the 'children of English-German mixed marriages, who are completely anglicised and without a trace of an accent, are teased and excluded by their fellow pupils. Pupils from the German School in Richmond, London, repeatedly have to endure insults and being called Nazis on their bus journeys home'.[40] This issue also became apparent in the course of our interviews: the antagonism children with one, let alone two, German parents suffered at the hands of fellow pupils and other children.

When looking for the causes of such behaviour it is important to cover as wide a terrain as possible and avoid a hurried retreat into generalisations. For the moment we will set aside the question of whether the discrimination experienced relatively recently by pupils at the German School is a result of the deterioration in relations between the two peoples following the end of the Cold War and German re-unification in the 1990s. We will also avoid giving too much credence to repeated claims of the media's power over children and young people, since these also tend to inhibit critical reflection. Perhaps this pattern of discrimination, which is noticeable among children and teenagers in various regions of Britain, has little to do with these 'usual suspects' and 'tried and trusted' answers. Perhaps it is actually, and certainly unintentionally, a byproduct of the way history is currently taught, which can occasionally have dramatic and far reaching influences on the lives of the next generation.

According to the relevant accounts and analysis of British-German relations, it appears that hostile attitudes towards Germany and the Germans diminished drastically in the early post-war years, despite politicians such as Ernest Bevin making no secret of their Germanophobia.[41] This decline was accompanied by the re-emergence of a range of perceptions and attitudes, towards all things German, that were stronger and more in line with traditional patterns. Thus we find the individual Briton distinguishing between Germany, the Germans en masse and individual Germans.[42] Several explanations have been offered for this swift change. These include the fact that the outpouring of hate during the war had been mainly concentrated on Hitler, and also that British losses during the Second World War were relatively low compared with those of the First World War.[43] Even Germany's bombing of London and other cities, the speeches and writings of Robert Vansittart, and the discovery of German war crimes and mass-murder failed to produce a solid, long-lasting resentment of Germany. In this context, John Mander pointed out that the German bombing raids actually played a significant role in generating a certain empathy for Germans on the part of the British public: it was because the British population had experienced the bombing raids themselves, that they knew 'what "Jerry" must be suffering'.[44]

Further factors that were influential in this change of attitude included Germany's unconditional surrender, Britain's responsibilities and experiences in post-war Germany, the impact of individuals such as Bishop Bell and Victor Gollancz, the suffering of the population in post-war Germany, and the positive behaviour of German POWs in Britain, to name but a few. This more positive mood that the British public were already feeling towards Germany and German people was further boosted at the time of the Berlin blockade in 1948, when 'a wave of sympathy and admiration, for the courage with which the population of Berlin stood up to the Soviet threat', swept through Britain.[45]

The change in British attitudes towards Germany largely reflected the changing role of the Soviet Union in world politics. The latter moved from wartime ally to Cold War adversary, whilst West Germany on the other hand, gradually made the opposite shift from wartime adversary to Cold War ally. The conventional explanations for the change in British public opinion are thus, to a large extent, based on political changes, and the traditional British sense of fairness and sympathy for the underdog and downtrodden. Numerous radio reports and newspaper articles kept the population well informed about conditions in Germany, the millions of refugees, the hunger and misery of the population, as well as the political and humanitarian assistance provided by Britain.[46] Publicity from incidents such as the attempt by several women in Bolton to live on German food rations for a week also created sympathy.[47]

Then, in the early 1950s, British perceptions of Germany worsened. Many seemed to find Germany's rapid economic recovery irritating, and there were other disquieting developments, such as the success of the extreme right-wing Sozialistische Reichspartei in elections held in Lower Saxony in 1951, and the debate about rearmament that began shortly afterwards and concluded with Germany's entry into NATO in 1955.[48] It was during this period that a series of hostile articles, written by British journalist Sefton Delmer, appeared in the *Daily Express* in March and August 1954.[49] Their appearance caused some in Germany to question 'with utmost seriousness, the reasons for such an inexplicable attitude'. 'Nevertheless, the answer is quite simple', wrote Walter H. Johnston a short while later, 'the series of articles corresponded with the political outlook of the newspaper, and the only interesting question, therefore, is why the newspaper had such an outlook?'[50]

The debate on German rearmament obviously concerned a large part of the British population. The government received a great deal of correspondence and numerous protest letters on the matter. Signed petitions were collected and public meetings held. Private individuals, NGOs and trade unions all voiced fears about the possibility of further wars and a resurgence of German militarism. However, none of this extended to Germans living in Britain.[51] German President Theodor Heuss experienced just how deep British displeasure at German rearmament was when he visited London in 1958. 'As the Queen took her guest on the customary sight-seeing tour of London, people lined the streets, but they did not applaud.' According to The *Times,* the population was interested but reserved. The mass-circulation newspapers of the Beaverbrook-Axis put things more strongly, regretting the German President's visit, and warning 'against any thoughts of a reconciliation with Germany'.[52]

In 1960, fresh signs of anti-Semitism surfaced in West Germany, which rightly provoked condemnation in the international press and demonstrations at the German Embassy in London.[53] And then during the 1960s, perhaps because Germany supported

Britain's bid to join the European Common Market, attitudes slowly softened. British press comment was far more favourable during Chancellor Ludwig Erhard's visit to London in 1964 than it had been to Theodor Heuss in 1958, although some newspapers still held 'radically anti-German' views.[54] Shortly after Chancellor Erhard came to Britain, the Queen finally made a long delayed visit to Germany in 1965. A year later, the German football team also managed to finally win the respect of English football fans in the legendary 1966 World Cup Final.

Writing in 1968 in an essay titled 'So sehen wir die Deutschen', Reginald Steed concluded that a change had taken place in British mass-circulation newspapers during the previous five years. According to Steed, only one newspaper still clung to its 'anti-German' position.[55] This change in public opinion was also reflected in Gallup polls of the time. When asked which country was 'Britain's best friend on the continent of Europe', while only 7 per cent said West Germany in 1963, this figure rose to 12, 25 and 27 per cent in 1967, 1977 and 1983, respectively.[56] The percentage of people who 'like them' (the Germans) showed a similar rise, from 66 per cent in 1968, to 74 per cent in 1977 and 75 per cent in 1983.[57]

During the 1980s, the tide of British public opinion again swung against Germany. Seemingly this was on the back of growing scepticism about the European Union, although perhaps an even greater factor in the mood change was the reunification of Germany, which raised greater alarm in Britain than it did in almost any other country: 'The British resented the economic miracle', observed Noel Annan, 'they cherished nostalgia for the days of the war, they feared the state that between 1864 and 1939 had launched five wars.'[58] The degree to which attitudes had changed was starkly demonstrated by disturbances in England that followed the German football team's defeat of England in Italy in July 1990. Cars were wrecked, Italian and Scandinavian youths attacked and a Scot wearing a German football shirt was beaten up.[59]

Germans living in Britain have occasionally spoken since then of a 'hostile environment' and 'kraut-bashing'[60] on a scale not seen even during the war years which requires more detailed analysis and explanation. The relationship between 'Tommy and Jerry'—as an article by Anthony Beevor in a February 1999 edition of the *Guardian* was titled—is still, as it has always been, determined by historical experiences, present irrationalism and (supposed) stereotypes, of which, from a German point of view, 'they are better than us at football', or 'they always get to the beach first' are certainly the least upsetting.[61]

According to opinion polls in the late 1940s, the British public's attitude towards the German people follows the same pattern as their attitude towards Germany. What the polls do not tell us, however, is what respondents based their answers on, and what experience respondents had actually had of Germans: was it in Britain or Germany? Was it prior to, during, or after the Second World War? It is safe to assume that respondents based their answers primarily on their experience of Germans in Germany, which makes it virtually impossible to draw any conclusion from these polls about attitudes towards Germans in Britain's towns or neighbourhoods. In September 1943, 45 per cent of those polled described their feelings towards the Germans as 'hatred, bitterness, anger', and a further 14 per cent chose the description 'dislike'.[62] In August 1945, as many as 25 per cent expressed 'sympathy', whilst 21 per cent still chose 'hatred' and 14 per cent

'dislike'.[63] Both of these polls were carried out by Gallup, and together they give a clear indication of the decline in animosity towards the Germans.

A contemporary poll undertaken by the Mass Observation Group allows us to make a more sophisticated interpretation. Replying in February 1945 to the question, 'How do you feel about the German people, apart from their leaders', 54 per cent said that they did not like Germans. As knowledge of German war crimes became more widespread during the course of 1945, this percentage increased. In April 1946, 59 per cent of those polled said they did not like the Germans, and in October 1946 the figure had fallen to 51 per cent. By the summer of 1947 this had dropped to 20 per cent, and almost half of those questioned were sympathetic, or at least stated that they held no 'ill feeling', towards the Germans.[64] This pattern corresponded with the results of a Gallup poll undertaken, in January 1947, in which 42 per cent classified their feelings towards the Germans as 'friendly', compared with 36 per cent who felt 'unfriendly'.[65]

The results of the 1946 polls are especially interesting as they were conducted at the same time as the debate on the repatriation of German POWs was in full swing. By this time many prisoners had already won the friendship and support of their immediate communities in Britain. In contrast to the often repeated, positive comments made about the German POWs that one finds in the press or government archives, relatively few similarly positive remarks or evaluations about recruited German women can be found in the same sources. Contemporary press reports told the public about planned or even already completed recruitment, and underlined the significance of this for employment policy, but they refrained from commenting further. Whether this was a case of deliberate restraint, or simply because such comments were not deemed newsworthy, remains to be seen. Hostility to Germans living in Britain was also absent from those newspapers—that otherwise never missed an opportunity to criticise developments in Germany—during this period. Here it is important to remember that the recruitment programmes took place in the period before the debate on rearmament emerged but after the big influx of European Volunteer Workers (EVWs), which had already been covered exhaustively by the media. Thus, in terms of choosing a period when public expressions of resentment were least likely to occur, there can hardly have been a more fortuitous time.

2
Immigration policy-immigrant policy

German POWs

During the Second World War, some 3.7 million German soldiers were captured by the British forces, however only a small number were actually taken to Britain. The majority either never left Germany or the European continent, or were sent to camps around the world, including Canada, Australia, the Middle East and Africa. There was even a group of German POWs under British authority held in the USA, of whom 123,000 were shipped to Britain in 1946. These and transfers from other countries meant that the number of POWs in Britain actually peaked in September 1946 at 402,200, compared to only 180,000 in April 1945.[1]

German POWs were detained at some 390 locations throughout the country. Of these, over 80 per cent were in England, around 10 per cent in Scotland, 5 per cent in Wales, and 2 per cent in Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.[2] Their conditions of employment were governed by the Geneva Convention. However, the idea of compulsory employment of German labour had already been discussed by the allies during the war in the context of future German reparations. The origins of this idea can be found in the Morgenthau Plan, in the minutes of the Yalta Conference and in a British government memorandum dated late February 1945. At the Potsdam Conference, the idea was no longer pursued explicitly but, as Arthur L. Smith rightly pointed out, at this time 'all of the occupying powers made use of the working potential of German POWs, be it in their own country, abroad or in Germany'.[3]

Employing German POWs in Britain was not as central to the economy as in the Soviet Union or France, but for some sectors their contribution appeared to be of vital importance at the time. Extensive use of the German labour pool was not actually made until relatively late—when the reservoir of 150,000 Italian prisoners had been exhausted without satisfying demand. For example, up until the beginning of 1945, there were only 17,000 German prisoners allocated to work programmes, and of these, 16,000 worked in the agricultural sector.[4] From May 1945, all but the 'really ardent Nazis' were given work to do.[5] How they were distributed amongst the various economic sectors was decided at interdepartmental meetings. German POWs were considered to be an extremely mobile source of labour. Because few were employed in the mines or factories and the majority worked in agriculture (usually over 70 per cent) or in the public building sector, moving locations presented relatively few problems for them.

The debate over repatriation

In August 1946, the number of prisoners in employment peaked at 362,000.[6] September of that year saw the start of regular monthly releases, in contingents of 15,000 to begin

with. Prior to this, the POWs had been divided into three different political categories: white, grey and black. Repatriation of the whites began in September 1946, the greys followed in January 1947, and then finally the blacks. POWs who possessed professional skills needed in the British zone in Germany (i.e. miners and foresters) were given top priority.[7] During the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (10 March-24 April 1947), the allies finally agreed to free all POWs by 31 December 1948.[8] The British plan for repatriation was preceded by a long and emotional public debate that is well documented in the newspapers and parliamentary debates of the day. Furthermore, the prisoners' work and pending repatriation became the main topic of conversation up and down the country for months. The position taken by individual newspapers, irrespective of their political allegiances, were virtually indistinguishable, and the traditional party-political divisions between Members of Parliament also became blurred on the issue.[9]

During the summer of 1946, as the number of prisoners in Britain grew, the debate became increasingly public. Exactly who started it is no longer certain since articles had appeared in the press and questions raised in the House of Commons several months earlier. Various NGOs, such as the Prisoners of War Assistance Society and Victor Gollancz's Save Europe Now organisation, took part in the campaign to release the prisoners as soon as possible. The latter organisation presented two high-profile petitions to the government. The first, in August 1946, contained 875 signatures including those of 3 archbishops, 55 bishops, 118 MPs, and a variety of councillors and university staff. Whitehall was called upon to release all POWs at the earliest possible date 'for the sake therefore of common humanity and of the British good name'.[10] In order to put an end to uncertainty over the prisoners' personal fate, the petition also called upon the government to make any such date public. The second petition, containing 2,000 signatures, was delivered almost a year later. The correspondence that followed this, between Prime Minister Clement Atlee and Victor Gollancz, was the focus of press articles and comments across the nation.[11]

Public demands were further articulated by church representatives. In June 1946, the British Council of Churches collected information on the mood in the camps and argued for rapid repatriation.[12] In this respect the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Griffin, and the Lord Bishop of Chichester, George Kennedy Allen Bell (nicknamed 'the pestilent priest' for his public criticism of the allied bombing campaign), should be mentioned.[13] Newspapers were also heavily involved in the repatriation debate, printing articles, commentaries and large numbers of readers' letters. With reference to remarks made by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a letter from a German soldier who had by then been a prisoner for five years, the *Manchester Guardian* of 10 July 1946 justified its demands on grounds of 'both justice and our own needs in Germany'.[14] This referred to the enormous demand for labour in Germany prior to the currency reform there. It also raised one of the main arguments of those against repatriation, namely, that because of the desolate state of the German economy, the POWs would be far more productive working the fields in Britain, and furthermore, that the German population would also benefit from this.[15] Other letters drew attention to the fact that the prisoners' work was the only form of reparation that Britain could expect from Germany, whilst alternatively, still others warned that further use of prisoners would only harm future relations between the two countries.[16]

As the debate ground on, words such as *slaves* and *forced labour* were increasingly used to describe the situation, deeply shaking British self-respect. The proponents of this view appeared to be trying to put British policy into the same category as the Nazi system of forced labour. An article in the *Daily Mirror* of 9 August 1946, titled simply 'Slaves', argued that people kept from their homes for an unspecified length of time would have to regard themselves as slaves, and that therefore they must be given a date for release.[17] In this respect the views expressed by the *Mirror* were shared by the *Manchester Guardian* which soon afterwards reiterated its demand that all forms of forced labour anywhere in the world should be brought to an end. The *Times* wrote that 'a clear-cut scheme is needed'.[18]

Views in the media were mirrored in the House of Commons, where the arguments were characterised by a series of questions, the substance of which was always the same. Here too the talk was often of slave labour, and this debate was not laid to rest until the government announced its strategy. In October 1946 alone, the issue was raised 21 times in House of Commons' debates. By February 1947, it had been discussed at least a further 70 times, mainly by members of the ruling Labour Party.[19]

Government considerations

Within the government various departments pursued their own agendas on the subject. This produced a serious clash of ideas between the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Foreign Office argued for rapid repatriation, partly in response to the demands of the public, but mainly to add credibility to its demand that the Soviet Union free its German POWs. In addition, the Foreign Office argued that the job vacancies that would occur if Britain released its prisoners could be filled by DPs.[20] In contrast, the Ministry of Agriculture focussed on protecting the interests of the farming community who feared a shortage of labour on the land. Finally, the Ministry of Labour, with an eye on the trade unions, was keen to be seen actively recruiting DPs from Europe. Thus, in some respects the German POWs were sometimes seen as competitors, and in the hierarchy of 'valued' foreigners they were consistently placed last.

The various positions became clear at a meeting on 15 August 1947, when representatives of the respective departments discussed increasing the rate of repatriation to 50,000 per month. Even if the Foreign Office had got agreement on this, the proposal could not have been fully implemented because the site where the POWs were officially released, Munster-Lager in Lower Saxony, could only process a maximum of 30,000 returnees a month. Furthermore, there was only one ship set aside to transport POWs across the Channel. In the event representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture argued against rapid repatriation. German prisoners made up 25 per cent of the workforce employed on the land at the time and the ministry was relying on the bulk of them to continue working in the coming year, 1948. They argued, therefore, that only those not working should be repatriated, and an increase in the repatriation quota was unthinkable until at least December when the harvest would be completed. Even then, the German workforce would still be needed on the farms in spring and summer. Regarding the possible employment of Polish or European Volunteer Workers, the representative from

the Ministry of Agriculture added that, 'there was a limit beyond which foreign labour was not acceptable in any industry. Foreign labour must not be too obvious.'[21]

Finally, a proposal similar to one adopted in France was put forward as a compromise solution: German POWs could be re-employed as a free workforce. The British government had already done something similar when, in 1946, Italian POWs had been offered just such an opportunity. Following the completion of a one-year work contract, the former Italian POWs were offered the right to resettle in Britain, provided they continued to work in the agricultural sector. In total, 1,400 Italians accepted the offer, and when their contracts expired, 1,100 stayed in Britain. From 1949, their wives and children were able to join them.[22] The Ministry of Agriculture called for a similar solution to be applied to German POWs. The idea was supported by the Foreign Office, although it was put under heavy pressure from individual MPs and the public to offer the Germans far greater freedom from the very start, rather than the restrictive one-year contracts.[23]

The debate on free labour

Running parallel with the repatriation debate, the idea of free labour, suggested and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1947, followed a public debate in parliament and the press in the summer of 1946. 'The Prisoners', an article published by the *Manchester Guardian* in August 1946, was one of the first to appear on the subject. It made an impressive appeal to the British sense of pride and self respect, arguing: 'If we must have foreign labour to make up our shortage—and there is much to be said for it—let it be free labour, the labour of free men whether German or Pole or Balt, paid for straight forwardly and accepted into our community. But forced labour is intolerable especially under a Labour Government.'[24] In the weeks that followed, the *Guardian* became an advocate of the idea that POWs be allowed to remain in Britain as free labour. Early in September 1947, the newspaper published a letter from a German POW who called for the right to stay for a limited period of time. Shortly after, a commentary went as far as to discuss the possibility of long-term resettlement in Britain.[25]

The Conservative MP for Solihull, Martin Lindsay, raised the suggestion in the House of Commons and added his particular slant on why German workers should be naturalised. This he expounded on in rather chauvinistic, biological terms: 'There must be many farmers who would like to keep prisoners of war, who are now working on their land, and in many cases these men would wish to stay in this country. There is another reason for considering such a course, and that is the ethnological one. We all know how much the United States have gained by the admixture of good foreign blood. There are, today, in Great Britain no fewer than 200,000 surplus women of marriageable age between 20 and 40. I am one of those people who believe that it is a great misfortune for a woman to be unable to fulfil her natural biological functions because of the shortage of males, yet this is the prospect of 200,000 women in this country.'[26] His opinions were not contradicted, but neither were they discussed further. Air Commodore Harvey (MP for Macclesfield), immediately followed with a call for POWs to be allowed to remain in Britain for a long period, although with the caveat that the offer of naturalisation only be extended after it had been made to the Poles and other ex-allies. In this respect he warned that a general change of attitude towards German people was essential. He himself did

not like Germans, he said, but 'in our own interests we have to be broad minded in considering this problem'.[27]

During a Commons' debate on 22 April 1945, Ness Edwards, representing the Ministry of Labour, signalled a willingness to compromise. It would be up to the individual farmer, he said, whether or not to continue to employ and give board and lodging to German POWs.[28] And here Mr Edwards touched upon one of the most pressing problems in post-war Britain: the desperate shortage of housing. After all, this was one of the main reasons that prisoners working on the land had been allowed to stay in the country at all. It was not simply the fact that their labour was valued and necessary, but also because on the farms they were not denying any British citizens, or even other foreigners, a place to live. But despite these arguments the government delayed: to avoid a political row at home they first wanted the support of the trade unions.

The trade unions

A certain amount of scepticism prevailed in government towards the trade union position. It was only a few months since the resettlement of Polish soldiers and their families in Britain had been debated at the Trades Union Conference at Brighton in October 1946. The views expressed there by some representatives broadly corresponded with the results of a June 1946 Gallup poll of public opinion. When asked if they would agree with a government decision to allow Poles who wished to remain in Britain the right to do so, 30 per cent said yes, whilst 56 per cent answered no.[29] However, despite their constant and widely broadcast expressions of resentment towards Polish migrants, the unions were not simply echoing public opinion. For the speakers at Brighton, and many other left-wing union members, ideology may have been an important factor in their appreciation of Polish unwillingness to return home. Poland was by this time linked to the Soviet Union by a treaty of mutual friendship, and the communist Polish Workers Party formed part of the government. In 1946, the huge change of opinion concerning the Soviet Union brought about by the Cold War had obviously not yet affected all the unions, and therefore people who refused to return were suspected of being Fascists or collaborators. But this ideological element intensified the latent reservations that unions held against the foreign workers, who were seen by many as being unpleasant, unnecessary and rivals to local union members.[30]

In Brighton, the unions mounted their biggest assault on the employment of foreign labour.[31] The extent to which some delegates focussed their disapproval is illustrated by the fact that the preceding debate on the 'Employment of Prisoners of War' took only a relatively short amount of time. Only one delegate spoke out against 'slave labour' in general, insisting that, in the long term, Britain would have to solve its labour shortages without the use of POWs. In the end, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) agreed to the further use of ex-POW labour, in accordance with prior agreements, without resorting to anti-German comments.[32] Certainly, an important factor in this decision was the assumption that the use of prisoners would be a temporary measure only. Besides, the POWs were helping with reconstruction work and in jobs that local labour found unappealing.

In April 1948, the unions still believed that the foreign workforce and German POWs were more likely to tolerate bad working conditions on isolated farms than their British

counterparts. Thus, in 1948 when the National Union of Agricultural Workers was asked its position on the possibility of German POWs staying in Britain as free labour, it responded that its primary aim was to protect British workers from German competition.[33] A compromise was finally reached whereby prisoners would only be allowed to stay if they could prove that they were lodging on a farm. They would not be allowed to move into tied cottages, which were highly sought after by British farm hands.[34]

The political decisions

Apart from the domestic issues that such a policy raised, the further use of POWs also had significance for British foreign policy. Several considerations that emerged during 1947 illustrate this, and four of these were particularly important to Foreign Office policy:

1 it must be absolutely clear that individuals had reached their decision to stay in Britain voluntarily;
2 the whole process should be monitored by the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross);
3 work contracts would be officially drafted; and
4 the employment of German civilian labour must not interfere with the flow of DPs coming to Britain.[35]

At the time, officials predicted that bachelors were the most likely to remain in Britain. The Foreign Office expected criticism to come from the Ministry of Labour and the USSR. To forestall the latter, it was decided that the plan should only be made public after the London Conference of Foreign Ministers (25 November-15 December 1947), even though cabinet had made its decision in October 1947.[36] The Foreign Office also applied several restrictions to both the domestic and foreign policy elements: The number of free workers was not to exceed 10,000, work was only permitted in the agricultural sector, and contracts were not allowed to extend beyond 31 December 1948, the date previously agreed upon at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers. In addition, cabinet decided to raise the rate of repatriation to 20,000 per month from December 1947.[37] The release of POWs was intended to be concluded well before the date agreed upon, and this objective was achieved when the final 546 German prisoners boarded their ship in Harwich, on 12 July 1948, to the tune of Lili Marlen.[38]

In the weeks following the cabinet decision there was nothing to suggest that the interdepartmental consensus was threatened. Under pressure from farmers, however, who preferred to keep their German workers (‘who have settled in, like the work and can speak English’) rather than swap them for DPs, the Ministry of Agriculture changed its position. It now demanded a quantitative expansion of the programme, including an extension of work contracts beyond the December 1948 deadline.[39] This created a new set of issues, some with far reaching implications. How could the Foreign Office explain, at home and abroad, that Britain would continue to use POWs beyond the date agreed upon in Moscow by the allies? Although all the ministries concerned had the right to conduct a thorough investigation, they were already in general agreement: The pressing housing shortage clearly restricted the number of DPs Britain could accept, and it seemed

impossible to recruit seasonal workers from the continent. Facing scepticism from the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture eventually managed to convince all concerned that the presence of ex-POWs would not disrupt the recruitment of DPs, nor threaten the jobs of British or other foreign workers.[40]

It was now essential for the government to persuade not only the public but also the allies that the decisions made by prisoners would be absolutely voluntary and that they would be treated exactly the same as other foreign workers. Holidays in Germany were seen as one way to confirm the voluntary nature of the process. The idea was that the POWs could be formally released from Munster-Lager in Germany and then return to Britain.[41] A more difficult question was whether the ex-POWs should be given the right to settle in Britain and to change jobs at will. Regarding the first, which was a *conditio sine qua non* for the Foreign Office, nothing was to be decided without the prior agreement of the agricultural unions. Talks between the Ministry of Agriculture and the unions took quite some time, and it was not until August 1948 that the Foreign Office finally received written agreement.[42] By then the number of free German workers had risen from 3,900 in 1947 to about 24,000. Half of these were living on farms, whilst the other half were the responsibility of the regional Agriculture Executive Committees or the Scottish Department of Agriculture.[43]

The delay in reaching an agreement did provide an opportunity to clear up other issues. By the summer of 1948, British industry had largely satisfied its demand for male foreign workers and further recruitment on the continent had been postponed or discontinued completely.[44] In the agricultural sector too, questions were being asked as to exactly how many German workers would be needed the following year, and under what conditions they should be offered employment. In August 1948, a compromise agreement was reached between the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture and representatives of the various farming interests: Workers already employed on farms, and those who signed a private contract to work in agriculture by 15 September 1948 would be given the right to stay indefinitely.[45] Some 15,000 German workers fulfilled these criteria and accepted the offer. Those who did not, had to return home, whether they wanted to or not. Meanwhile, there were delays in the transfer programme that threatened the Foreign Office commitment to officially release all prisoners in Germany by the summer of 1948.[46] In the following weeks various alternatives were discussed that would allow for an official release without jeopardising the potato harvest, which took until December in some parts of the country. In the end it was left up to the individual worker whether to return to Germany for a short visit or not.[47] The government's change of position on the matter was certainly influenced by political changes in Eastern Europe and the build up of the Cold War. Now, it was felt less necessary to consider the USSR when dealing with the issue.

The recruitment of Displaced Persons, ethnic Germans and Germans

The British economy's demand for workers could not be satisfied by employing POWs or granting work permits to other foreigners alone. Thus, the government decided to recruit DPs on the continent. In view of the military occupation of Germany and Austria, recruitment in both countries was at first carried out exclusively by state authorities rather

than private agencies.[48] As far as the recruitment of DPs (who were renamed European Volunteer Workers once they arrived in Britain) was concerned, humanitarian considerations were of secondary importance. The deciding factors were the candidate's occupational qualifications, age, gender and marital status.[49] But the shortage of labour alone is not sufficient to explain the political decision to recruit DPs. There were more than enough potential migrants in the dominions and colonies who were British subjects and ready to come to Britain. Therefore, the decision to recruit DPs was also a conscious decision against the migration of non-white persons into Britain.[50]

There was a certain continuity in the government's position on this matter, in that negative comments were made during the war about the promotion of 'black British subjects' to officers, stationing 'black American troops in Britain', and British women marrying black GIs.[51] The assumption was that white migrants from Europe 'would be more skilled, valuable and assimilable […] than non-Europeans'.[52] Potential migrants to Britain faced either positive or negative discrimination depending on their ethnic origin; in the words of some academics, they were racialised.[53] According to the 1949 Royal Commission on Population, 'immigration on a large scale into a fully established society like ours could only be welcomed without reserve if the immigrants were of good human stock and were not prevented by their religion or race from intermarrying with the host population and becoming merged in it'.[54]

It was not until October 1948 that a Working Party on the Employment in the United Kingdom of Surplus Colonial Labour was appointed. It found quite serious problems with unemployment, in Jamaica for instance. But in view of the number of ex-Polish soldiers, EVWs and ex-German POWs Britain had already accepted by then, there was scepticism as to whether Britain had the capacity to accept further recruits. The Working Party also clearly preferred migrants from Europe, since they would be contractually bound to their work and only able to change jobs with permission. This was, of course, a restriction that could not be applied to British subjects. There were additional fears that some of the colonial migrants might find the British benefit system too tempting and shun paid work altogether.[55]

In the post-war period, ethno-political criteria were applied by all countries attempting to recruit workers overseas. Individual European countries, such as the Federal Republic of Germany, also followed this pattern when formulating policy concerning migrant workers.[56] But what set Britain apart was its use of 'race' over and above that of 'nationality'. Kathleen Paul has described the inherent contradictory nature of this policy, which is both inclusive and exclusive at the same time, as being the discrepancy between a 'formal nationality policy' and 'informally constructed national identity'. Thus, whilst the Nationality Act of 1948 defined all subjects of the British Empire as being British, according to the prevailing view only a white person could be considered a 'real' Briton.[57]

The political decision concerning the recruitment of a foreign workforce was taken by the cabinet on 14 February 1946, and at the same time a Foreign Labour Committee was set up.[58] The idea of recruiting 1,000 women from the Baltic States who were living in the British zone in Germany had been under consideration since September 1945. Under this plan, the Balt Cygnet scheme, the women could be employed in the UK health system, TB clinics in particular, for a limited period of 12 months. The political debate surrounding this programme led to one of the most important provisions in the later, and

much broader scheme to recruit DPs. Before the first of the 2,575 Baltic women recruited had even arrived in Britain on 19 October 1946, the ministries responsible had reached a common understanding that what they were dealing with was, in fact, resettlement. Crucial to this understanding was acceptance that the British Military Government in Germany would never allow a return of DPs en masse once any contracts they held had expired.[59]

The approach taken by the government was further supported by external influences. For example, a delegation of the Cotton Board travelled to Germany in the autumn of 1946 to look for suitable machinery to be dismantled and brought to Britain. On their return they proposed that the chronic shortage of textile workers could be resolved by recruiting 100,000 DPs.[60] Probably prompted by the delegation's visit, in November 1946, the UNRRA, who were operating in Germany at the time, suggested to the British government that they recruit DPs for the cotton industry. And although the official reply from London rather brusquely explained that this was as likely as their resettlement on the moon,[61] a number of political decisions to effect such a recruitment were taken in rapid succession.

In December 1946, the Foreign Labour Committee approved a suggestion from the Ministry of Labour that DPs be recruited to work in the cotton mills.[62] A month later, cabinet asked the ministry to make official preparations for recruitment to begin.[63] Also, in January 1947, the National Joint Advisory Council, comprising the Ministry of Labour, the British Employers' Confederation, the TUC, and representatives from the nationalised industries published the 'Statement on the Economic Considerations affecting Relations between Employers and Workers'. It made the point that the shortage of workers in some sectors of the economy presented a constant threat to jobs in others because it could restrict the supply of raw materials and energy.[64] The Economic Survey of February 1947 underlined this consensus: 'Foreign labour can make a useful contribution to our needs. The old arguments against foreign labour are no longer valid. There is no danger for years to come that foreign labour will rob British workers of their jobs.'[65] Humanitarian considerations were set aside, and policy regarding the employment of foreign labour was based purely on demand for workers and the ability to house them. The Ministry of Labour's task now was to assess the demand for workers in each sector and reach agreement with the trade unions to enable recruitment to begin in April 1947.[66]

The trade unions

The Labour Government attached great importance to the negotiations with the trade unions, which is hardly surprising given the powerful position they held in the post-war period. The government's approach was also consistent with its maxim that arrivals should take place with minimum domestic disruption and with the support of as wide a social consensus as possible. This required both time and patience, as the TUC was not prepared to agree to a broad, comprehensive strategy. Instead they insisted upon negotiations with each of the unions concerned.[67] Although union opposition no longer contained the level of vehemence and resentment evident at Brighton in 1946, it was still considerable, and most pronounced in those unions with an almost exclusively male membership, such as the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of

Agricultural Workers.[68] Resistance to the idea appeared to be far weaker in the textile industry. Here, as we shall see, the attitudes of individual unions representing, for example, the male dominated mule spinning or the female dominated ring spinning, are particularly interesting.

It was not until autumn 1947 that the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of Agricultural Workers finally agreed to the employment of EVWs.[69] By the end of 1946, in the agricultural sector only Scottish representatives had accepted the proposals. This meant that in England and Wales, foreigners could find themselves employed under regulations administered by the Ministry of Labour, without the consent of the unions.[70] In the mining sector, it took eight months of tough negotiations before the union acquiesced to the employment of ex-Polish soldiers, and a further seven months before they accepted EVWs. And despite this agreement, opposition to the policy continued in other sectors.[71]

Resistance to foreigners was partly due to a general dislike of strangers, irrespective of where they came from. Local miners in the Yorkshire pits, for example, referred to the Welsh miners in their midst as ‘all piss and wind’.[72] Ideological aspects also played a part in the resentment, and some EVWs, like the Polish soldiers before them, were labelled ‘Fascists or pro-Fascists’. Such comments can be found in a speech by the Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Horner, delivered at the congress of the British Communist Party in February 1947.[73] Memories of the high unemployment in the inter-war years were another factor in the opposition, coupled with a fear that the recruitment would harm efforts to improve pay and conditions. The mining industry was at the time pressing for a five-day week and an increase in holidays.[74]

The compromise reached between employers and the unions, under the mediation of the Ministry of Labour, was laid down in over 30 industrial agreements, the core elements of which were all very similar: The foreign workforce was only to be employed where there were no British workers available; the EVWs must work for the same pay and conditions as their British counterparts, however, ‘if redundancy of workers occurs’, the EVWs were to be first out. To these general provisions, individual unions added industry-specific requirements. In the cotton industry, for instance, the number of foreigners employed in each area of production was not to exceed 10 per cent of the workforce operating in that area.[75] In some sectors, such as mining, cotton and the foundries, EVWs were obliged to join the respective trade union.[76]

The combination of compulsory union membership and the redundancy clause is a good illustration of the fundamental attitude many unions had towards foreign workers. As members, they would be reliant upon the unions if redundancy threatened, but in accordance with the agreement, this support was ruled out from the start. With this the unions were not only treating part of their membership as second class citizens, they were also adopting a position that was contrary to their ethos and discriminatory in the extreme.[77] TUC attempts in July 1949 to have the redundancy clause declared invalid, on the grounds that many of the foreign workers were now union members and therefore should be afforded the same rights as their British colleagues, failed to change anything.[78] A short while later, criticism from the United Nations that EVWs were ‘victims of an official policy of discrimination’ also failed to produce any fundamental change in union behaviour.[79] And again, the TUC could do little except appeal to each union to drop its discriminatory clauses.[80]

The ethnic German workforce

In April 1947, Westward Ho began (Table 1). At first recruitment took place in camps within the British zones in Germany and Austria. It was soon extended to camps in other western zones, to Denmark, and finally the Lebanon, East Africa and Rhodesia, where female Polish refugees were recruited.[81] The largest group of EVWs were Ukrainians, who numbered 20,930 (this does not include the 8,000 ex-members of the SS who came to Britain as POWs), followed by 14,018 Poles, 11,832 Latvians, 10,192 Yugoslavians, 5,732 Lithuanians and 4,114 Estonians.[82] Due to the continuing chronic shortage of housing in Britain, the plan was to recruit mainly young unmarried persons who could then be accommodated in hostels, factory lodgings and camps, or become lodgers in private households or on farms.[83] Although these objectives were largely realised, and of the EVWs arriving in Britain only 268 men, 1,696 women and 1,860 children came as dependents, within the first weeks it became clear that male DPs were far more prepared to take up the offer than females.[84] The Ministry of Labour was, therefore, charged with increasing the number of women recruits but opportunities to do this were limited. In July 1947, regulations concerning accompanying dependants were relaxed a little, and the recruitment of men was put on hold. Of the women recruited, only those not suited to factory work were employed as domestic staff in

Table 1 Distribution of EVWs by industry (initial placing upto 27 January 1951. Westward Ho and Balt Cygnet)

	Men	*Women*
Agriculture	29,554	65
Depots and installations	1,603	—
Brick and allied industries	2,729	2
Cement	262	—
Coal mining	10,968	—
Cotton	1,083	7,564
Domestic service Hospitals and similar institutions	109	3,782
National Service Hostels Corp.	1,458	919
Others	3,589	2,058
Hosiery	24	265
Hydro-electric scheme (Scotland)	250	—
Iron and steel	1,355	1
Jute	18	175
Laundries	2	389
Nursing	169	425

Pottery	137	31
Quarrying	708	—
Rayon	554	1,000
Timber production	107	—
Wool	1,113	3,173
Miscellaneous	1,238	217
Total	57,030	20,066

Source: Tannahill, J.A., *European Volunteer Workers in Britain,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958, p. 133.

households.[85] But this failed to produce any noticeable effect, and the only option left appeared to be further recruitment from other ethnic groups. This led to an intense discussion about the possible recruitment of Germans and ethnic Germans, something that had been categorically ruled out in some of the industrial agreements with trade unions.[86]

Recruiting ethnic Germans was first proposed in February 1947, when a commission comprising two representatives from the Cotton Board and one from the Board of Trade and Ministry of Labour visited Austria to assess the possibility of recruiting DPs.[87] In a sweeping generalisation, one of their reports described ethnic Germans as all being collaborators and Nazis, and this was the major reason for the group initially being ruled out as potential migrants.[88] At the same time, the British Military Government in Vienna praised this group as being 'our best workers and those most likely to make good British citizens'.[89] In this context it is also important to note that Jews were explicitly excluded from Westward Ho.[90]

The Ministry of Labour took the lead in recruiting German and ethnic German labour. Seeking agreement at the highest level with the Foreign Office, on 4 November 1947 the Labour Minister, George Isaacs, sent a letter to Ernest Bevin, his counterpart at the Foreign Office. In it he explained that the cotton industry would need an additional 10,000 female workers by March 1948, and a further 26,000 in the following months. He went on to state that the demand for workers could only be met by recruiting women from abroad, but that unfortunately there were not enough suitable workers amongst the DPs on the continent. Only Italy and the western zones of Germany and Austria appeared to have a supply of suitable female workers, although Italy would probably have to be ruled out because most of the unemployed women there lived in the south and had little experience of working in factories. George Isaacs said nothing against the recruitment of ethnic Germans in Austria, as he regarded them as DPs, but to counter the inevitable objections, he suggested the German women be given restricted residency permits and only short-term work contracts that could later be extended if need be. Only young women aged up to 28 or 30, 'who could be said to be capable of re-education along democratic lines of thought', were to be considered.[91]

Ernest Bevin's answer was prepared by Lord Jellicoe, in the German Political Department of the Foreign Office, and it reflected the mounting tensions in international politics at the time. With regard to the approaching London Conference of Foreign

Ministers (25 November-15 December 1947), he warned of possible Soviet criticism should the British government go so far as to recruit 'Potsdam ethnic Germans', adding that after the conference it may be possible for the government to alter its position. As before, he argued that families should not be excluded, and that the recruitment of German women should take place within programmes that were already operating. Public opinion in Germany would need to be considered, because the communists were sure to accuse Britain of abusing its position as an occupying force by recruiting 'slave labour'. In view of the latter, he suggested that emigration regulations be relaxed. The German labour authorities would also have to be involved in the process, but first the question of a transfer of wages would have to be settled.[92] Ernest Bevin followed Lord Jellicoe's line in his answer to George Isaacs. But he insisted that the recruitment of men from Austria should also be allowed, and pointed out that the Ministry of Labour would have to come to an arrangement with the American Military Government on this issue.[93]

Once the Ministry of Labour had overcome its opposition to the recruitment of workers described as 'excellent labour material'—an expression used soon afterwards by a member of the Foreign Office[94]—the most difficult task still lay before them: negotiations with the trade unions and representatives of the textile industry. Despite the obvious demand for workers and the shortage of suitable DPs, employers imposed conditions and at times sided with the unions.

The government's plans to recruit German workers were immediately reported by the press in Lancashire's cotton region, and a meeting on 30 January 1948, convened by the Ministry of Labour in the offices of the Manchester Labour Exchange and attended by employers and trade unions, received particular coverage. Given that it was only two-and-a-half years since the end of the war and the extent of the Nazi genocide and atrocities was now common knowledge, it was remarkable that reports of the plan to recruit Germans and ethnic Germans were made without comment.[95] However, at a meeting of the National Joint Advisory Council that followed in February 1948, TUC representatives expressed concern over whether, in view of the two world wars that Germany had caused, British workers would be able to accept German women. They eventually agreed to the plan despite this, although both insisted that existing security checks be tightened, and that expulsions be made possible on other than purely work-related grounds.[96] With this, all problems appeared to have been taken care of, especially since even the Foreign Office changed its position after the London Conference of Foreign Ministers.[97] Nor were further objections expected from the British military governments in Germany and Austria. The latter had campaigned for quite some time for their ethnic Germans to be considered, and in Germany, the military government had urgently warned of a surplus of female labour.[98]

The first responses to the plan from the Textile Commission in Austria were promising. They estimated that there were 20,000 ethnic German women aged between 18 and 40 alone. These women were single, and in the commission's view, represented a 'good field for recruitment'.[99] Similar views were expressed about a camp holding 2,000 German refugees from Yugoslavia: 'As to industrial and social suitability, the Mission was satisfied that excellent workers for the textile industry could be recruited from the camp and there appeared to be little doubt that they would fit into the British way of life.'[100] The question of political security screening appeared not to be a concern as eastern European commissions had combed the camps for years looking for war

criminals. The British authorities appeared satisfied that ‘the whole work of screening and investigation has been completed by these government missions’.[101]

However, not quite everyone was in agreement. At almost exactly the same time as the Textile Commission in Austria was responding favourably, a representative from the Cotton Board predicted that making new local agreements on ethnic Germans would create problems. Furthermore, he expected a ‘definite antagonism to German nationals’.[102] Soon after, a union representative spoke of a ‘good deal of hostility’ towards the Germans.[103] On the latter point, at least, he was right. The cotton unions, and those of the wool industry too, were only prepared to tolerate ethnic Germans in their mills and would not accept newly recruited German women.[104] Furthermore, the Operative Cotton Spinners in Oldham made any future agreement conditional: The employment of ethnic German women must not in any way allow male-dominated mule spinning to be replaced by the mainly female-dominated industry of ring spinning.[105]

Union consent corresponded with the views of the delegation who, while visiting Germany, also called for ethnic German refugees from the Sudetenland to be considered. And thus, with the agreement of the Foreign Office, recruitment of ethnic Germans for work in the textile industry began, initially in Austria only.[106] Only then did the true extent to which the Ministry of Labour had relied upon the recruitment of German women in its planning become apparent. Instead of the 20,000 extra foreign workers it had been hoping for in 1948, the ministry now estimated getting 5,000 to 6,000.[107] All the original plans to recruit German women alongside ethnic Germans, even those involving possible restrictions on residency and employment sector, now had to be shelved.[108]

During the course of 1948, feelings towards ethnic German refugees in Britain changed. Those initially seen as suspected collaborators now became highly valued and desirable migrants. There are noticeable parallels here to changing attitudes in other recipient countries too. In Canada for instance, the Canadian Council for Resettlement of Refugees was established with the support of the Canadian government in 1947. It helped ethnic Germans to emigrate to Canada for years to come. France began recruiting ethnic Germans in 1948, and in June 1948, the Displaced Persons Act was passed in the USA allowing ethnic Germans to settle.[109] There is also a noticeable change of tone in the British press during this period. Ethnic Germans were now being portrayed as the victims of harsh evictions, forced from areas that had been occupied by the Germans during the war. In some cases these portrayals even suggested that the ethnic Germans were former concentration camp prisoners.[110] According to the *Manchester Guardian,* some were ‘Germans in no other sense than that they use the German language’.[111]

In the early months of 1948, there was great expectation amongst employers in Lancashire that soon the enormous demand for workers would be satisfied by a newly recruited workforce. But despite the public optimism, there remained a certain amount of scepticism as to whether the recruits would be accepted by the local workforce, or even the general public. The *Manchester Guardian* article quoted above also appealed to its readers that ‘provided that no special hostility manifests itself towards offering lodgings to German speaking women, or working with them, the Ministry of Labour should be able to start bringing recruits from Austria to Lancashire cotton mills at the rate of about 500 a week’.[112] This only made the disappointment all the greater when, despite huge effort by the government and much advertising in Germany and Austria, numbers remained well below expectations, and accommodation that had been prepared remained

empty. Despite the political obstacles that had prevented them from recruiting German women, the government was blamed for the failure and accused of mishandling the situation on the continent. Since by now West Germany had reformed its currency, all chances of success appeared to have gone.[113] Within the limits set by the unions, the Ministry of Labour had always aimed to satisfy the demand for labour in the textile industry with a female workforce. Ideally this would have been made up of ethnic German women, but their (official) number under Westward Ho remained a disappointing 744 men and 634 women.[114]

The Sudeten Germans

Contemporary sources show that the Ministry of Labour remained confused as to the true aims and objectives of the textile unions during the summer of 1948. This is illustrated by the fact that early on they considered broadening the scope of recruitment to include Germans from the so-called Sudetenland (Czechoslovakia) in the Westward Ho programme. These were Germans who had either escaped to, or been directed to, the American occupied zone. According to a Ministry of Labour official, in the eyes of the trade unions the Sudeten Germans were regarded as being very similar to the ethnic Germans, who were already being accepted by the trade unions in the cotton industry,[115] even though the Sudeten Germans had been given German citizenship following the 1938 Munich Agreement and German annexation policy.

In July 1948, the British and American military governments began talks aimed at recruiting up to 10,000 Sudetenland women in the American zone for the British textile industry.[116] It is no longer clear exactly what the target quota was, but it was noted internally that it should be at least 3,000.[117] One of the main points of disagreement became obvious in the very first round of negotiations: the American Military Government considered the Sudeten Germans to be German citizens, whereas the British considered them to be ethnic Germans.[118] The negotiations that concluded the deal took place in Washington. The US State Department, supported by its military government, insisted that these women be given unrestricted residency permits, that the German labour offices be involved, and that recruitment be limited to untrained and unemployed women only. The British government accepted these conditions. It was the seemingly less important question of the terms under which a woman could prove her identity, and more particularly her nationality, that caused a major difference of opinion and led to the negotiations becoming extremely protracted.[119] The Americans remained intransigent on the point that the Sudeten Germans were German citizens, and refused any compromise solution that would have made these migrants more acceptable to the British public, such as stamping passports with the words ‘stateless persons’ or ‘persons of undetermined nationality’.[120]

An agreement was not reached until 18 March 1949, far later than had been originally anticipated and only after Britain’s complete acceptance of the US terms. One month later recruitment began.[121] A fresh round of talks with the textile unions was entered into to explain why the Sudeten Germans would be arriving with passports declaring them to be German. Whilst the cotton industry unions finally agreed to accept the recruits, officials in the wool industry continued to withhold their support. Where possible, the government avoided publicly announcing the nationality of the women.[122]

Regarding initial hopes that as many as 10,000 Sudeten German women might be recruited, once officials from the labour exchanges in the American zone discussed the actual numbers involved (at an Anglo-German meeting on 13 December 1948) these expectations were dashed—even before any recruiting took place. In the Württemberg-Baden district, only 220 female textile workers had registered unemployed, and of these 200 were over 50 years old. The total number of women unemployed in the district was 12,000, 10 per cent of whom were refugees. In Hessen, 20,000 women were unemployed, and again 10 per cent of these were refugees. Bavaria appeared to offer the best solution. Here there were 67,000 women registered unemployed, including 28,000 Sudeten Germans, of whom 3,600 were textile workers.[123] The situation was far from ideal, and even the decision to raise the age limit to 35 did little to improve it. The number of people recruited under Westward Ho remained well below what had been expected, and finally totalled only some 1,300 (Table 2).

The failure of the programme was analysed in detail by the Ministry of Labour. Many explanations were given, ranging from the women being prevented from bringing family members, which certainly was a drawback, to the fact that in the meantime living standards had risen in Germany. Due to the acute shortage of housing the situation was impossible to remedy, and furthermore, the unions were making particularly sure that none of the stipulations of the agreement were being broken. Willingness to work in the British textile industry did not increase in the summer of 1949, when it became possible to recruit ethnic Germans in the American zone.[124]

Table 2 Recruited German and ethnic German labour, including family members (with those who returned to Germany in brackets) 1948–50 (figures as at month-end)

Month/year	*Westward Ho*		*North Sea scheme*	*Sudeten German*
	Men	*Women*		
6/48	188	42	—	—
7/48	408	89	—	—
8/48	466	120	—	—
9/48	466	156	—	—
10/48	540	203	—	—
11/48	617	223	—	—
12/48	684	246	—	—
1/49	703	247	2,507 (14)	—
2/49	705	264	2,890 (26)	—
3/49	736	293	3,619 (43)	—
4/49	743	303	3,990 (58)	—

5/49	744	303	4,567 (78)	24
6/49	744	323	4,959 (89)	122
7/49	744 (1)	325	5,573 (102)	313
8/49	744 (2)	340	5,977 (121)	411
9/49	744 (2)	340 (1)	6,840 (145)	474
10/49	744 (2)	357 (3)	7,128 (168)	632 (2)
11/49	744 (2)	359 (3)	7,604 (216)	772 (3)
12/49	744 (2)	359 (3)	7,809 (235)	816 (5)
1/50	744 (2)	366 (3)	8,263 (279)	938 (11)
2/50	744 (3)	371 (3)	8,551 (325)	1,018 (14)
3/50	744 (3)	382 (3)	8,867 (371)	1,084 (18)
4/50	744 (3)	382 (3)	8,984 (396)	1,176 (22)
5/50	744 (3)	501 (3)	9,212 (422)	1,158 (29)
6/50	744 (6)	573 (3)	9,457 (457)	1,223 (32)
7/50	744 (6)	634 (3)	9,608 (494)	1,304 (59)
8/50	744 (6)	634 (4)	9,713 (496)	1,304 (59)
9/50	744 (6)	634 (4)	9,713 (604)	1,304 (59)
10/50	744 (6)	634 (4)	9,713 (689)	1,304 (59)
11/50	744 (6)	634 (4)	9,713 (749)	1,304 (61)
12/50	744 (6)	634 (4)	9,713 (928)	1,304 (63)

Source: PRO HO 213/596, Statistics.

Nor did it increase when the Lancashire Cotton Corporation attempted their own recruitment drive following the demise of Westward Ho.[125]

The employment of ethnic German and German women in the British textile industry depended largely on the trade unions, who had enormous influence over the drafting and application of British immigration policy. We can only speculate as to which was more remarkable or unusual—the unions in Lancashire and Yorkshire, or those in areas such as Scotland, Cheshire or Derbyshire. The latter all agreed to the employment of both groups of women, whereas the unions in Lancashire and Yorkshire made no secret of their resentment of German and ethnic German labour. Contemporary articles and textile union minutes suggest that union officials viewed all types of foreign workers with suspicion, but their reasons may have been the same as those found in other sectors of the economy. These included, a wariness of all strangers, xenophobia, political-ideological resentments, experiences of previous mass-unemployment, and a conviction that an improvement in pay and conditions could only be brought about by a shortage of labour. Locally, the unions made sure that the 10 per cent clause was strictly adhered to in factories. In some

cases they agreed special exceptions or insisted upon reductions in the foreign workforce.[126] They also repeatedly referred to the redundancy clause and demanded compulsory union membership for the EVWs, something the unions in Bolton achieved in 1949 by threatening to halt the employment of foreigners altogether.[127] Overall, the numerous articles in which workers and union officials not only called for a halt to the recruitment of EVWs and other foreigners but even discussed possible repatriations, did nothing to aid acceptance of the newcomers in the factories and regions.[128]

The North Sea scheme

In contrast, the recruitment of German women under the North Sea scheme was far less complicated. This may have been due in part to the fact that their labour permits were initially limited to 2 or 3 years. It may also have been because they were mainly employed in the National Health Service, or in so-called hardship households where working conditions or the physical and psychological demands of the job tended to put local workers off.[129]

In June and July 1948, a high-ranking delegation of British women, made up of four MPs and the Chief Women Officer of the TUC, Nancy Adams, visited the British zone in Germany at the invitation of the Ministry of Labour and the Foreign Office. They wanted to see first hand what progress Westward Ho was making and investigate the possibilities of recruiting German women.[130] The delegation was followed with interest by the British press, something that policy makers in the Ministry of Labour would certainly have been happy about as it offered an opportunity to test public opinion. The *Yorkshire Observer* printed a front page article under the headline ‘To aid industry: Britain may get German women’. It quoted one of the delegates, Mural Nichol (Labour MP for Bradford North), assuring readers that the government would not undertake anything without the prior agreement of the unions.[131] Just one month later, the Ministry of Labour issued a press release stating that a limited number of German women would be coming to Britain for ‘domestic work in hospitals and institutions and for farmers’ households in urgent need of domestic help’.[132]

The consent of the various ministries that was required to officially extend the Labour Permit System to Germans was also obtained without difficulty, as was agreement to lift the general ban on German citizens at the end of 1948.[133] Parallel to this, logistics to facilitate the North Sea scheme were being put in place, and immediately afterwards, recruitment began in the British zone aided by the German labour exchanges. At the special request of the Foreign Office, who for political reasons and ‘as a gesture of defiance to the Russians’ wanted to see Berlin treated equally, recruitment was also carried out in the British sector in Berlin.[134] No family members were allowed to accompany the recruits, and to begin with it was not even certain if a transfer of wages would be possible. But these limitations appeared to have little adverse effect on recruitment. By the end of August 1948, the first month of recruitment, 4,000 women had already applied and been accepted, whilst another 1,000 applications were being processed.[135] The women had to be between 18 and 28 years old and resident in the British zone for at least two years. They were recruited mainly as domestic staff for hospitals, hostels, sanatoriums and hardship households. If they had relevant

qualifications or experience, they were employed in industry (including the Scottish textile industry, and the stocking factories and sweet factories in the Midlands).[136]

According to Ministry of Labour statistics, a total of 9,776 women were recruited under the North Sea scheme by the end of July 1950, of which 9,685 had arrived in Britain. Among them were 5,983 domestic and 1,821 industrial workers, 1,140 hospital orderlies, 773 student nurses and 59 trained nurses.[137] A survey carried out prior to this gives a more detailed picture of the type of work being done and where. It records 1,663 nurses, of which 678 were students, 690 nursing orderlies, 253 ward orderlies and 42 were trained nurses. In comparison, the group employed as domestic helpers was far bigger, numbering 5,853. Of these, 2,945 were employed in hospitals, 127 in hostels, 1,466 in farmers' households, 1,264 in private households and 51 in educational establishments.[138]

Private and commercial placement

German women were not recruited through the state schemes alone. By the end of 1951, some 20,000 had been recruited to work in British households by private individuals or commercial agencies.[139] They also required labour permits, initially valid for one year. In the case of a private placement, the prospective employer obtained the necessary work permit and sent it to the applicant in Germany to use to get her visa (and usually paid the travel costs also). Private placement was common when members of the armed forces or the Control Commission returned to Britain and wanted to bring their domestic help with them.

The commercial employment agency sector developed separately but at the same time as individual recruitment was growing. Commercial agencies, however, had to weather the opposition of the German authorities. The latter were strongly of the opinion that employment agencies should be under state control only, and to support this view they gathered information on the commercial agencies, issued recommendations and warnings about dishonest and prohibited business practices, and on occasion even went so far as to describe these agencies as 'illicit international dealers in women'.[140]

One way in which recruits for the domestic job market could be secured and unwelcome migration limited was through bi-lateral agreements that guaranteed the German labour authorities a role in the selection process. In January 1950, Britain and West Germany came to just such an agreement. Called the PDW Scheme (Private Domestic Workers Scheme),[141] this was to produce only modest results. During 1950, it merely managed to process 1,354 women, compared to a total number 8,290 of labour permits issued to German domestics that year. In 1951, the scheme processed 781 of the 6,773 successful applicants, and in 1952, the figures were 498 and 5,684 respectively.[142] In the 1950s, most of the German women who travelled to England came for a limited period to improve their knowledge of English. They tended to shun the bilaterally agreed route, preferring instead to be privately placed by an agency. Word of mouth information about the future employer and type of work was crucial to the process. As with the other specifically female recruitment schemes, they too received labour permits that were initially limited to a year and were subject to all the applicable regulations concerning foreign workers.

The British way of life

The British government's responsibility for the migrants did not end when they arrived in Britain. In stark contrast to the laissez-faire attitude of earlier years, when various charitable organisations, churches or communities had played a part in looking after the migrants,[143] in the case of the EVWs (and also the ex-Polish soldiers) the government, and more particularly the Ministry of Labour, now felt duty bound to continue giving support. In this way, British *immigration policy* became supplemented by an *immigrant policy.*

It should be noted that no detailed accounts of the planning processes of those involved are available. Nor is there much clarity about whether those involved had relevant experience, knowledge and qualifications. But what does stand out is that many of those that took part in the discussions—regardless of their role in government, communities or NGOs—used similar arguments. This suggests that there was a widespread common view on the process of assimilation. And even if the usual methods of academic investigation have failed to prove anything specific on this occasion, many interesting parallels can be found in other pieces of research. For example, the representatives of the Chicago School of Sociology wrote in 1921 that: 'The process of assimilation involves the development in the immigrant and the native of similar apperception masses. To this end it is desirable that the immigrants should not only speak the language of the country, but also know something of the history of the people among whom they have chosen to dwell. For the same reason it is important that native Americans should know the history and social life of the countries from which the immigrants come. […] Assimilation is thus as inevitable as it is desirable; it is impossible for the immigrants we receive to remain permanently in separate groups. Through point after point of contact, as they find situations in America intelligible to them in the light of old knowledge and experience, they identify themselves with us. We can delay or hasten this development. We cannot stop it. If we give the immigrants a favourable milieu, if we tolerate their strangeness during their period of adjustment, if we give them freedom to make their own connections between old and new experience, if we help them to find points of contact, then we hasten their assimilation. This is a process of growth as against the "ordering and forbidding" policy and the demand that the assimilation of the immigrant shall be "sudden, complete, and bitter".[144] If one were to convert such views into policy, the scope of expectation and areas of responsibility would be clearly defined. The migrants would have to learn the language spoken in the host country along with some of its history. At the same time, the host society would also learn something of the migrants' backgrounds. Viewed in this way, assimilation appeared inevitable and segregation merely a transitory phase. Social contact, a favourable environment, tolerance, and patience would all be crucial.'

The records of a conference on 5 November 1948, to which the Ministry of Labour invited bodies representing the individual nationalities (mainly refugee organisations founded before 1945), British NGOs, and representatives from other ministries, offer an initial indication of the government's political aims. The purpose of the meeting was to gain an insight into the views of these national groups, 'on various topics', in order to consider the direction of future policy. All agreed that the process of assimilation would be a lengthy one, and that it should not be forced. To quote one delegate: 'If the good will

of the foreign workers was to be preserved, it was therefore essential that the process of assimilation should be conducted tactfully and slowly and should not be enforced in a heavy-handed manner, which would only arouse an instinctive and insuperable opposition in their minds.'[145]

Of further interest are some comments concerning 'inter-racial friction' between various groups of European migrants, and their hopes of sometime returning to their home countries. The latter would lead many not to bother seeking contact with Britons or even other foreigners. It would also limit their desire to learn English. It is possible that the national organisations exaggerated the problems of segregation somewhat to underline their own importance in dismantling it. Whether or not government representatives had expected such statements we cannot say. What did become obvious is that the mental disposition and the general willingness of the migrants were regarded as the key to assimilation. In view of the tensions just described, the government promised that in exceptional cases 'for removing immediate and unavoidable racial tension, foreign workers should be grouped in hostels according to their nationality'. However, this compromise clashed with one of the basic elements of government thinking on this issue. That is, that the creation of 'separate foreign enclaves' should be avoided. It was clearly explained to the national bodies that these could not be allowed to develop, despite the concessions. It was widely agreed that the process of assimilation could be speeded up if the foreign workers were to live in accommodations of their own because this would involve greater contact with the British public. Participants at the meeting also agreed that learning English was a must.

Because it rather inflated their importance, inviting the national bodies to the 5 November 1948 conference was in itself a contradiction of government thinking at the time. Thomas *et al.* concluded that 'even the nationalistic societies do more to promote assimilation than to retard it'.[146] Although the very existence of these groups was evidence of a degree of segregation, they could do much to help the government achieve its aims, if they were prepared to help. But further official dealings were characterised by pragmatism, and soon afterwards, at a purely inter-departmental conference on the Welfare of European Workers, it was decided that rather than meet regularly, 'ad hoc conferences to discuss particular topics should be held as required'. On 18 November 1948, participants at an interdepartmental conference decided that the establishment of 'hostels for the exclusive use of residents of one particular nationality' was to be avoided, irrespective of possible short-term benefits these may have had. It was also decided that greater attempts should be made to reach the EVWs through their own newspapers, and that with the help of the Ministry of Education, English lessons should be increased.[147]

By learning English and mixing with local people, the migrants were supposed to assimilate into their new neighbourhoods. Furthermore, a process often referred to as the adoption of the British way of life was accepted, or as Lady Reading Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) put it: 'What we wanted was to help foreigners to see with our eyes. […] The British way of life was not found in Hansard nor in the newspapers—it was found in our homes and we needed individual initiative and courage in helping these people to settle. It was a step forward when they were placed in work but this was only the first step; employment did not mean assimilation unless further help was given.'[148] According to this understanding, assimilation was not possible without individual or organised help. At the same time, this demanded a change in attitude and behaviour among the general

public in order to create the conditions for intensive social contact. The foreign workers should be accepted into clubs and associations to get to know 'British people in an informal way'.[149]

Views on assimilation were certainly not limited to official circles and the large NGOs. Similar opinions were expressed far from London. Shortly before Christmas 1949, for example, an Oldham newspaper called for EVWs to be invited into British families and to be further encouraged to join local sport and cultural clubs. Under the headline 'A friendly word, a helping hand, and lonely EVWs may become happy Oldhamers', it went on to warn against the creation of a 'separate community' and encouraged readers to help the EVWs find a place to live and learn the language.[150] On the same day, two articles appeared in *The Halifax Daily Courier & Guardian* reporting on a local conference 'to examine means to encourage EVWs to assimilate the British way of life'. In line with the Ministry of Labour's thinking, the head of the local labour exchange emphasised that assimilation should progress slowly: 'If we try to do too much too quickly we shall probably do more harm than good'. The chairman of the Educational Committee supported him: 'The real integration would come with the next generation when the children had been to school with English children.'[151]

The numerous similar articles that appeared in the press during December 1949 indicate that there were problems with assimilation in the textile regions of Lancashire and West Yorkshire at the time. The articles were appealing to both groups, but especially the local population, to be patient and allow time for the door to British society to open wider for the foreigners. The chairman of the Halifax Education Committee commented that as a 'mixed race' the British population was always proud of its role as a 'refuge of the persecuted'.[152] *The Halifax Daily Courier & Guardian* was clearly of the same view: 'There is, however, obvious need for the growth of better understanding and the forging of closer links between the foreigners and ourselves. And it is equally obvious that most of the approaches must come from us. It is not our job to force our ways or even our friendship upon any foreigner, but it is our job to provide him with every opportunity to get to know us and try in every way we can to make it easier for him to overcome the many difficulties faced by every stranger in a strange land. It is not so much a question of breaking down barriers as of ensuring that there are numerous easy-swinging gates and encouraging their use—in both directions. Three gateways are at present too narrow—the gateways to information, to the English language, and to Halifax homes.'[153]

To help prevent problems, the government pursued a policy of providing comprehensive information that was aimed at the recruited workers and local population alike. Working with each group, the government sought to increase knowledge and understanding of the other group, and encourage more enlightened attitudes and behaviour. Recruits had access to information at every stage from recruitment to their arrival in Britain, and in this way the government hoped to make the initial meetings between newcomers and locals as harmonious as possible. Mr Skeffington-Lodge (MP, Bedford) had demanded such a policy in the Commons when he called for a 'complete mental readjustment on the part of the people of this country'.[154]

In the immediate post-war years it was relatively easy for the British public to inform themselves in detail about political, social and economic conditions in continental Europe, and about the plight of DPs and German refugees. The press reported on the

recruitment, arrival and experiences of the EVWs in Britain, as it did on the position of ex-Polish soldiers and German POWs. The articles were based partly on independent research and partly on official press releases that were designed, amongst other things, to test public opinion. Apart from the reports on Polish soldiers resettling in Britain, the first time the state actively tried to use the media to influence public opinion was in 1947 following the publication of an economic survey in which the recruitment of foreign workers was announced.[155] In April 1947, the Ministry of Labour gave detailed information to the press about the EVWs' recruitment, reception and work places. They had also insisted that the term 'European Volunteer Workers' be used to describe the recruits. 'Since then' commented an official in August 1947 'the press has worked the EVWs "to death" as a news subject and they have been featured and photographed on every possible pretext.' The tone of these reports was never hostile, but instead neutral, or even friendly. Regarding public opinion, the same employee noted that there was a clear distinction between how the Poles and EVWs were viewed. The latter were often linked with Belsen or Buchenwald, while the Poles were more often associated with 'illegitimate children in Scotland and elsewhere'.[156]

The continued negative perception of Polish soldiers, who suffered accusations of Fascism and social problems, particularly in the mining areas, led to a discussion during the summer of 1947 on how to educate popular opinion about foreign workers. The government committee that was formed, under the title *Education of Popular Opinion on Foreign Workers,*[157] met in December 1947 and February 1948. It comprised representatives from several ministries and NGOs,[158] and its most important action was to publish a brochure entitled *Workers from abroad.* The first print run of 10,000 copies was distributed to newspapers, unions, NGOs, labour exchanges and other official bodies that could further disseminate the information to readers and members. A few months later, a second print run followed. The brochure consisted of 11 pages of text, and its aim was stated boldly on the title page: 'The purpose of this pamphlet is to foster a fuller understanding of the employment of foreign workers in this country.' It provided information on the reasons for employing foreigners, on the recruits themselves, and their particular histories. Furthermore, it explained the political screening, economic and humanitarian aspects, and other more general processes involved in recruitment.

Members of the committee were also in contact with the national charities. They visited hostels, camps and labour exchanges. They took part in meetings and conferences, and they acted as consultants to the BBC on programmes such as 'Operation Westward Ho' that was broadcast by the BBC in January 1948, and for concerts given by EVWs or special programmes aimed at the migrants.[159] It is hard to measure how much influence the committee and individual government offices exerted over the media. Meaningful comment and analysis was rarely set down on paper as it was largely an informal process driven by personal contacts. Press releases and informal disclosures of information offered a way of gauging public reaction, and this was made easier by the tendency of the day to write letters to the editor. Press releases were used, for example, to prepare the public ahead of the recruitment of German domestics and student nurses in 1948: 'Statements were issued to the daily press on both the nursing and the domestic schemes, and no adverse criticism has resulted. On the contrary considerable interest in the scheme was evinced by the press.'[160]

Besides the state authorities, NGOs, trade unions and media, churches were also involved in spreading the government message. Several of them had recognised problems early on and made their own efforts to change public opinion. During a meeting in 1947, the Dean of Chichester stated that British Christians should support the recruited refugees and DPs and oppose prejudice: 'Anti-foreign prejudice was really anti-Christian prejudice.'[161] The British Council of Churches formed its own Foreign Labour Committee and delivered its own pamphlet, 'The Stranger in our Midst', that took the form of an informative appeal.[162] In July 1948 it was forced to conclude that despite its efforts, communities in some areas seemed completely unaware there were EVWs living amongst them.[163] This appears to illustrate that these organisations experienced a common problem for all those attempting to change public opinion. That is, despite all the activity there were no guarantees that the information was actually being taken on board by the public, and stereotypes and prejudices against the migrants would endure in the minds of many.

Finally, informing the migrants about their new country of residence was also part of the assimilation process. Here there is a difference between information given within the context of the recruitment process and information given after they had arrived in Britain. The former consisted of a four-sided pamphlet, produced by the Ministry of Labour including a 'Statement of Commitment' on the back page. The pamphlet was written in German and English, and tailored to different groups of migrants. It contained specific information about likely jobs, wages, accommodation, rationing, tax, social security and currency, luggage regulations, and what pocket money they could expect on embarkation and arrival.[164] Furthermore, migrants were issued with a 50-page brochure, also produced by the Ministry of Labour, but this time printed separately in German or English versions. *To Help You Settle in Britain,* as it was called in English, provided extensive information on the migrant's rights and duties, opportunities to learn English, radio programmes, rationing, the education system, currency, imperial weights and measures, leisure activities and travel options.[165] In addition, the migrants received leaflets from communities, churches and other NGOs in the camps and hostels they went to on arrival.

In a peculiar move—the British press thought so too at the time—a three-week preparation course was held in August 1948 for German student nurses at a Ministry of Labour establishment in Colwyn Bay. Its objective was to help them improve their English and introduce them to the British way of life. The preferential treatment received was, of course, clearly dependent on their chosen profession. But it also corresponded fully with existing positive assessments of German migrants, as an immigration officer's report from 1948 illustrates: 'Speaking generally the girls seem to be of a much better type than the average D.P.'[166] Parallel to the racialisation of potential migrants within the framework of the immigration policy, this is further evidence that the government used race-based methods for evaluating the ability to assimilate.[167] Thus, as early as September 1947 an employee of the Foreign Office commenting on German POWs noted: 'They are good stock and more easily assimilated to the British economy than other foreign immigrants.'[168] Similar comments were made in the Ministry of Labour in April 1949: 'It is thought that the rather better knowledge of English possessed by German and Austrian women had made it easier for them to settle down. Both groups have more in common with the British people than the EVWs and can therefore more easily acclimatise themselves to life in this country.'[169]

3
Life and work in post-war Britain
The migrants' experience

German POWs

'For me, being a prisoner was fantastic. Fantastic food and everything.'[1] This is how Paulus described his experiences as a prisoner of war (POW) in Britain when interviewed for this study. Following his capture he was sent to America via the Panama Canal, spent time in parts of California, Oklahoma and El Paso, and then lived more than half a century in the Scottish Highlands near his former camp and the farm where he was billeted immediately after the war. The farm is still there, as are several huts and a water tower from his camp. Paulus was part of a group of German prisoners brought to Britain from America and subsequently sent to Scotland. As with many other POWs, he has remained in the locality ever since. Others have returned to Scotland after retiring from jobs in England, or have firm plans to do so. Like many in this group, Paulus only had to live a short while behind barbed wire. Early on he was allowed to live and work on a farm and mix with the locals, but his fond memories stand in stark contrast to contemporary reports on the mood in the camps, and how those returning to Germany described their experiences.

Life in the camps

The discrepancy between the reports given by those returning from Britain and the general living conditions of German POWs in Britain was so great that in 1948 the World Young Mens Christian Association (YMCA) commissioned an investigation. It was carried out at the Munster camp between 24 May and 9 July 1948 by a small team directed by Alexander Mitscherlich.[2] They interviewed 660 POWs, 201 of whom were returning to Germany from Britain and concluded that the ambivalence displayed by the returnees, as well as 'their arrogance, discontent and bitterness', reflected mismanaged expectations rather than real grievances. In France and the Soviet Union, for example, prisoners had been under no illusions as to the treatment they could expect and the work they would be given. They had no expectations and were therefore not disappointed. 'England, on the other hand, had always emphasised that it was fighting Germany on humanitarian grounds, it supposedly wished to make things better. […] In England, they wanted to politically re-educate the POWs, to turn them into democrats.' All this raised expectations for some to a level that reality could not possibly live up to, since in reality there was much privation in the British camps in Belgium, there was a political screening process, undercurrents of anti-Semitism in Britain and the questionable objectives of a re-education programme to name but a few. This meant that despite the relatively good

living conditions in Britain, or the ‘Golden Cage’ as some called it,[3] some prisoners found an unbridgeable gulf between their expectations and reality. This explains the attitude of respondents in the Mitscherlich Report to questions like: ‘During your captivity, what caused you the most suffering?’ Sheepishly, more than a few had answered; ‘Yes, well actually we did not suffer at all, we were all well, I felt at home with the English family and was accepted there as if I were a son.’

This discontent was well known to the British government and the International Committee of the Red Cross, who regularly inspected the camps. It was also known to the YMCA, whose employees visited the POWs and distributed books, magazines, sheet music, games, sports equipment, writing materials and tools to the prisoners from their headquarters at Norton Camp.[4]

Richard Stokes, MP for Ipswich, exposed the dubious nature of the political screening process when he commented in the House of Commons on two cases on 24 March 1947. In the first, a screener reportedly asked a future Catholic priest if he had ever had sexual intercourse with a woman. When the man replied no, the interviewer then asked how he intended to bring joy to his life without a woman. Another prisoner was simply asked how many times a day he masturbated.[5] Such instances were obviously the exception, but screenings seldom appeared to last more than a few minutes. They usually consisted of a few short questions and answers, after which the POW was assigned to the white, grey or black group (or where applicable A, B+, B, B− and C), with whites being first, greys second and blacks third in terms of priority for repatriation. The process was administered by the Control Office for Germany and Austria (COGA), which employed 52 screeners on temporary contracts, one-third of whom were supposed to be of ‘foreign origin’. Now and then, for example when a POW and a refugee from Nazi Germany came across each other, things became particularly tense. But even a contemporary German investigation concluded that although the screening was ‘pretty superficial’, ‘in the majority of cases the categorisations were accurate’.[6]

The questionable effect the re-education programme had on many POWs was also well known. Special viewings of BBC programmes or visits to democratic institutions, such as town council meetings, were met with interest as they offered a means of passing the time.[7] Initially, participation in lectures and discussions was also widespread. In October 1946 alone, 110 external speakers held 1,164 lectures in 268 camps on subjects ranging from history, politics, economics and culture.[8] But as their detention continued and their freedom of movement improved, interest in these, and in camp church services, declined. At the same time contact with the British public was increasing, so that in effect re-education was put into the hands of the general public. As a report from Wigan in March 1948 noted: ‘Since the beginning of 1947, re-education has passed into the hands of the population of Lancashire, whose friendliness has proved a great help. The ordinary workman in the Midlands is responsible for the fact that the majority of the POWs in this camp is pro-British.’[9]

Re-education had a far greater effect than some contemporary accounts suggest. This is particularly true of Wilton Park Camp in Buckinghamshire. Starting in January 1946, it offered a six-week course consisting of lectures and discussions on political, economic and cultural subjects. The first intake comprised 300 prisoners in 12 classes, but later, civilians from Germany were also accepted. Amongst these were civil servants, trade union officials, journalists and scientists, members of the new parliaments and politicians

such as Kurt Schumacher and Theodor Heuss. Professors from Oxford, Cambridge and London came to give lectures, as did high-ranking British politicians such as Lord Beveridge, ministerial civil servants and clergymen including Bishop Bell from Chichester.[10] As well as Wilton Park, there were other tertiary institutions offering places to those wishing to study theology or medicine. Furthermore, university courses were offered at Crew Hall camp and at Cambridge University, and trade apprenticeships and language courses were also available. In October 1946 alone, over 40,000 prisoners took advantage of these opportunities.[11] This background is useful for putting into context some of the negative comments concerning re-education, particularly since definitive information about its long-term effects does not exist. At least, as Helmut Wolff puts it, these courses caused one to 'reflect on basic political ideas and critically examine National Socialism and its philosophy in detail'.[12]

Focussing specifically on internment, those concerned seem to have barely been aware of any long-term effects. Most reports about camp visits noted that the majority of prisoners were interested in only one thing—going home. Personal problems, fears for one's existence, worries about wives, children, family members, fiancés and friends, the loss of house and home, or even homeland, uncertainty about one's life and status on returning, and the knowledge that, as a prisoner, one could do nothing and was in fact unable to help anyone, were all of far greater importance than lectures and discussions on democracy, history or literature. According to British and international reports, the mood in the camps was a mixture of apathy, bitterness, mistrust, disappointment, resignation, scepticism and emptiness. There was a prevailing sense of unfairness, and a weariness of all the talk.[13]

The arrival of German POWs from America in 1946 invigorated some camps, but overall did little to raise spirits since most of these men had been looking forward to returning to Germany only to find themselves in Britain. Occasionally this group even heightened tensions. Interned intermittently since 1940 or 1941 in the USA or Canada, many persisted in wearing blue Luftwaffe uniforms. This somewhat aggressive display of insignias, rank and medals[14] was at odds with the practice in most British camps, where the dominance of the committed National Socialists had ended with the German capitulation. As a rule the German POWs from America wore American uniforms that had been dyed black, with the letters PW prominently displayed on the back in white cloth. In Britain, prisoners whose uniforms were worn out were given replacements that were of a reddish-brown or green colour with brightly coloured pieces of cloth (in the shape of circles or diamonds) stitched across the backs and onto the lower left and upper right of the trouser legs.[15]

The degree of apathy seen at many camps depended on a number of factors, one of which was the personal style of the British camp commander. Harshness, incursions, discipline followed to the letter, searches that were judged by international observers to be excessive, and poor living conditions did take place but were generally the exception.[16] The camp's location together with its character and the work opportunities it offered were of greater importance. Here it is apparent that in the secluded and isolated camps the mood was worse than in those near towns, where boredom and frustration in the evening or on work free days were less likely to occur.

As the years passed and contact with the British public grew, the POWs increasingly saw the local population rather than their fellow prisoners as the primary source of

friendships and a social life. The German capitulation in May 1945 also contributed to the deterioration in POW camaraderie, as the wartime discipline that had prevailed internally broke down and was further undermined by mutual 'mistrust and discord' as a result of the screening. The Mitscherlich Report noted that 'if one asked the POW about the prisoners' behaviour toward each other at the time, most answered that a very good sense of comradeship prevailed. But when questioned in more detail, it became clear that this comradeship consisted mainly of the one prisoner leaving the other in peace. The highly irritable and mutually aggressive behaviour of the earlier period had mellowed. Now friendships developed as like-minded people, people from similar professions or the same region formed into groups. One did not worry for the others, often one hardly even knew them.'[17] This conclusion was reinforced by views expressed during our interviews. The prisoners who remained in Britain were often loners, who in some cases did not seek contact with other Germans until after retirement. Very few made lasting friendships in the camps. Also, many of them had been moved frequently to camps and farms in different parts of the country, and this too explains their difficulty in making friends. Very few commented effusively on comradeship. What seemed to be more important was the opportunity for personal development or participation in leisure activities. For example, forming a band or a theatre group, learning English or how to distil whisky, or getting involved with the local football team.[18]

The layout of the camps and the leisure and educational activities on offer varied widely according to a camp's size and the length of time a POW spent there. Numbers fluctuated, but it is safe to say that in September 1946 the number of camps, work units and small infirmaries peaked at 390 and there was a total population of 402,000 German POWs.[19] To begin with, some camps were little more than a collection of tents or Nissen huts, stone outbuildings, factory buildings or warehouse sheds. But there were also camps of a grander nature where the POWs lived in villas, on country estates and even in Victorian houses within the regal surroundings of Kensington Palace Gardens. Some accommodation was newly constructed, whereas others had previously housed British and allied troops.[20] The number of prisoners living in a particular camp might fluctuate between several thousand and a few dozen. There were camps for officers and for enlisted men, large work camps and small hostels, youth camps and transit camps. Barbed wire was removed from the perimeters of most hostels at the end of the war, and from the small camps (which constituted two-thirds of camp units) during 1946.[21] Life behind barbed wire continued in the remainder until early 1947. After that almost all of the work camps had their wire replaced by fencing or other symbolic forms of demarcation that were no longer designed to hold people in, but rather to keep intruders out as they soon became tourist attractions or a place for a Sunday jaunt for British families. The removal of barbed wire reflected the futility of escape attempts from the British Isles. According to official figures 1,976 prisoners attempted to escape, but only two succeeded in permanently evading recapture. Some 400 prisoners were put on trial before British courts, mostly for robberies committed whilst on the run. Two were charged with the murder of fellow prisoners.[22]

There was as much variation in comfort and hygiene inside the camps as there was in their size. Compared with today's standards they were primitive, but in relation to the standards of the day they were not bad enough to warrant a mention in the interviews. For many the subject was taboo—as was sexuality, which will be dealt with later—and little

or nothing was said about it. Even particularly searching questions (asked 'off the record') failed to produce much information about hygiene conditions. The war had lowered health and safety standards, although in British camps an acceptable standard of hygiene was usually maintained. Contagious diseases did not break out, and the increasingly popular use of DDT took care of the rest.

The ICRC kept an eye on hygiene, but usually reported on peculiarities rather than everyday arrangements. For this reason, reports from camps in the latter half of 1948, in which ex-German POWs were now living as civilian workers, are interesting. Because they comment on a number of significant changes, they allow conclusions to be drawn about the conditions preceding them. For example, comments about doors being fitted back onto toilet cubicles appear frequently.[23] Another report notes that in August 1948, 160 men were sleeping in barracks in Sutton Bridge (Lincolnshire) that were designed to hold 250 men. Each dormitory contained between 8 and 14 single beds. Fresh pillowcases were provided once a week, although sheets were not changed as frequently. Meanwhile, electric lighting and coal burning stoves had found their way into the accommodation. Lockable lockers had also just been delivered to the camp, but the once well-tended garden had now become a wilderness.[24]

Contact with the British population

The strict wartime ban on fraternisation, under which it had been a criminal offence for a member of the public to even talk to a prisoner of war, was lifted in December 1946.[25] Although not everyone had observed the ban, transgressions were a serious matter. If a case was proven, tough penalties could follow. For example, a doctor and a teacher were fined £100 and £50 respectively for entering a camp in February 1946 to talk to the prisoners on 'humanitarian grounds'. In March 1946, taking letters from prisoners to the post office cost several nurses their jobs, on top of the fines they had to pay, and in June the same year a woman in Scotland was sent to prison for a month for doing the same thing. On the other hand, a farmer who was rescued from a bull by two prisoners went unpunished, although the War Office forbade any form of reward being given to his rescuers.[26]

All of these incidents took place in 1946 when, according to Henry Faulk, 'the war psychosis in Great Britain was largely gone, and the traditional sense of fair play became valid once again'.[27] One can assume that extensive contact existed before this, but the British public possibly now felt less cautious about such relationships and able to be more open. Perhaps some simply wanted to provoke a response in order to direct attention to what they saw as miserable conditions and injustice. In the House of Commons in October 1946, the MP for Northampton advised that a pragmatic approach be taken towards contact between POWs and the public: 'These men are here to help, and, in those circumstances, we ought, within reason, to do what we can to make life as reasonably pleasant for them as we can.' He firmly recommended that German prisoners be given the same privileges as those given to the Italians before them: The right to visit British houses and flats (which in his opinion was the best form of re-education anyway), and the opportunity to visit cinemas or shops in the afternoons. Nevertheless, he saw problems arising if the POWs were allowed to go out with women, and therefore strongly advised that they remain in the camps overnight.[28]

It took a further two months before the ban on fraternisation was lifted and replaced by more liberal regulations in December 1946. The POWs were now permitted to move freely up to a distance of 5 miles from their camps. Furthermore, they could stay outside the camp until 10 o'clock at night, receive mail and packages from the British public, and send post to Germany (transfers of money had been permitted since the previous October). They were also allowed to travel as passengers in privately owned cars, and to go sightseeing or to church unaccompanied but they were still banned from entering dance halls, cinemas, restaurants or shops, be they accompanied or alone. Sexual relationships and the use of public transport also remained forbidden, but prisoners were permitted to play football against British troops or the local village team.[29]

Allowing the prisoners to accept invitations and enter private houses within a 5-mile radius from camp was certainly a concession that had some far-reaching consequences. Although the new ruling was only announced to the public via the press a few days before Christmas, it produced an overwhelming public response. By 19 December 1946, Bury camp alone had already received 300 letters inviting POWs by name to various Christmas celebrations.[30] The response was similar at the Norton work camp near Sheffield, where 336 of the 1,500 prisoners detained there enjoyed the festivities in the homes of English families.[31] Other camps were reported completely empty: 'There were not enough prisoners of war in our camp to accept all the invitations we received. I worked for a firm, the foreman of which invited me and another person to join them. […] There was one of those Christmas puddings that they make here and that was a new experience for us. And then I found some money in it and I thought, oh well it must have fallen out of somebody's pocket. They noticed as I slid it under my plate, and they laughed. It's meant to be lucky, they said. […] Ours was full of coins. I had over a pound.'[32] Whilst the majority enjoyed the invitations and festivities, 'chairs, carpet under their feet, coffee in cups not mugs, silver spoons, books, Xmas tree, music (gramophone), pictures, food',[33] and forgot for several hours that they were prisoners in a foreign country, others could hardly bear the sight of families together and happy children without becoming homesick and depressed.[34]

Further concessions followed in 1947. From March on, music groups were allowed to perform outside the camps, and the identification patches on uniforms were removed, which was not always an advantage: 'When we had our patches, civilians gave us lifts. After the patches were off, there were no lifts and we had to walk all the way.'[35] From July, prisoners were permitted to own and carry small amounts of Sterling in cash, and they could now also use public transport within the 5-mile radius and visit cinemas, shops and restaurants. From July 1947 they were also permitted to marry British women. By Christmas 1947, POWs could accept invitations to celebrations up to 100 miles away between the hours of 2 p.m. on 24 to 6 p.m. on 26 December. Finally, at Easter and Whitsun 1948, travel permits were issued for distances of up to 20 miles, and prisoners were permitted to stay out until midnight.[36]

The gradual relaxation of restrictions created conditions that enabled increased contact between Germans and Britons outside the workplace. This brought particular relief to those prisoners who had developed close relationships with a family they had come to see as 'theirs'. One cannot generalise about these hosts. Many were practising Christians. Ex-soldiers who had fought in the First or Second World War and who themselves had been POWs also numbered amongst those who actively struck up friendships with the POWs,

as did families that had lost sons in the wars or relatives in the blitz.[37] There are several contemporary observations suggesting that the 'lower classes' were particularly hospitable, but they are not reliable enough to allow generalisations to be made.[38] There is some evidence to suggest that the behaviour of the public reflected a general sympathy for the underdog: 'I think that in those days they all felt sorry for us' said Gernot in an interview.[39] There were differences in attitude between towns and the countryside, and also, perhaps, some regional variations. The most marked difference however was between the experiences of those prisoners lodged on farms and those in camps. The former had daily contact with the local population, were known in the village or area by name and gradually became part of the village community.

The 'good behaviour' of the German prisoners, which was also officially recorded,[40] helped to make the concessions more acceptable to those Britons who still had reservations. There were those who remained unfriendly to the prisoners, spitting when lorries carrying them passed by, making victory signs, swearing at them, amongst other things.[41] There were others, however, who simply refused to put the new concessions into practice. A student association in London cancelled a planned invitation, explaining that many of its members were refugees from Nazi Germany: 'They were not bitter in the least, but they simply felt they could not face it.'[42] In Essex, POWs were refused entry to several cinemas. In Yorkshire some cafes refused to serve POWs, even when they were accompanied by a local. The same was true of an area in Lincolnshire, where restaurant owners adopted a similar attitude and a bus company refused to carry POWs.[43] An angry reader of the *Manchester Guardian,* who had heard of this, wrote to the War Office about it, whereupon he received the reply that the bus company was free to make its own decisions. His original letter promptly appeared in the newspaper.[44]

Not much is known about the discussions that took place within families or between friends and neighbours about private invitations. Notable in this respect is an observation made by the YMCA that, during Christmas 1946, POWs received more invitations than the British camp guards did.[45] Pamela Howe Taylor commented in her autobiographical work *Enemies Become Friends,* that at the time her 16-year-old cousin could not believe his ears when he heard that a German had been invited, and there were neighbours 'who wouldn't speak to those who were showing friendship to the prisoners'.[46] A few years ago, Alathea Andersohn finally published an essay of her memories of Christmas 1946. Her grandfather had, apparently, got into a taxi, driven to the nearest camp and collected three POWs who were total strangers. From then on, these three were regularly invited to his home. Commenting on the local reaction, she wrote: 'It wasn't a popular attitude, at least in the small town where they lived. My mother remembers that they were able to resist the criticism only because my grandfather held the Military Medal for bravery in the First World War and had been active in the local Home Guard in the Second, and because she herself had volunteered for military service in the Second.'[47]

British churches played a crucial part in bringing locals and POWs together and reducing the prevailing resentment. According to contemporary reports, the work of the non-conformist churches and other local church groups was particularly significant, as was that of the Salvation Army, the Society of Friends and most importantly the YMCA.[48] It remains unclear how many British clergymen assisted their German colleagues in the camps (of which there were 194 German priests and vicars, 19 curates and 58 lay preachers in October 1946).[49] Two updated lists, in the archives of the

Bonhoeffer-Gemeinde in Sydenham in London, contain almost 150 names, but the actual figure was likely to have been higher.[50] Even the smallest gestures aroused the interest of the press. An example of this was the episcopal gratitude expressed after POWs helped with the harvest in 1947, or a concert performed by prisoners in a ruined church in Hastings.[51] British and German clergymen together visited the camps and hostels soon after the end of the war.[52] Church services and other local events also played a part, although some prisoners found it difficult at first to adjust to 'periods of religious devotion accompanied by coffee and cakes'. Some even saw an expression of 'English materialism' in this.[53] Nor did these activities always take place unopposed. In several areas the clergyman had to win round a reluctant parish to allow prisoners use of the church buildings. In other places the reverse was true, and it was the parish who had to convince the vicar. In another case a camp commander reportedly had to persuade both the parish and the vicar with the argument: 'There will be no British Zone in Heaven'.[54]

Sexuality and choosing a partner

The earlier mentioned Mitscherlich Report dealt with the question of sexuality, both inside and outside the camp, with remarkable openness. Other studies either ignored the issue completely or simply provided figures showing the number of marriages between POWs and local women. In contrast, Mitscherlich's team asked returning prisoners directly and without beating about the bush: 'Of what significance was your sex drive to you—how did you deal with it?' Some 201 prisoners returning from Britain were questioned. A total of 9 per cent answered that sexuality had, for them, been of no importance whatsoever, whilst a further 27 per cent had considered it of little importance. Some 44 per cent found it to have been of usual importance, whilst 18 per cent felt that it had become more important than usual. Of those questioned 16 per cent stated that they had masturbated. Nobody admitted to being homosexual, which considering the taboo, defamation and existing laws, is hardly surprising. According to the report, 34 per cent stated they had had heterosexual contact with locals; when asked in a different context, 43 per cent admitted to 'intimate relationships'. The reliability of the statistics can be questioned or even rejected on a number of grounds, but a comparison with returnees from France offers a certain degree of general validation. According to their own statements, only 16 per cent of those returning from France had 'intimate relationships' with locals.[55]

In comparison with other countries, the opportunities for heterosexual contact appear to have been far greater in Britain. The information available indicates that the camps held a certain appeal and a willingness of many British women to enter into intimate relationships with POWs, even though this often brought condemnation from Germans and Britons alike. This is illustrated in the recollections of an ex-prisoner who stated in 1961: 'There were about 180 to 200 prisoners of war in the camp. It had previously held Italian prisoners of war, who were allowed to move freely outside the camp. The German prisoners of war "took over" the Italians' "girlfriends".'[56] Other sources support this assumption, including several letters written by POW Egbert von T. who in 1946 wrote of the 'English girls lack of self restraint'.[57] In addition, the *Manchester Guardian* published an article in the same month, declaring: 'The wire […] is more to keep the English out than the Germans in. It is an almost universal complaint from camps in

populated districts that girls make a nuisance of themselves and one group of German prisoners petitioned a commandant to protect it from two young women in one area.'[58]

In 1969, Ruth Körner, a former refugee from Nazi Germany who was active in the British re-education of German POWs, told of the 'contempt' that very young English women faced in particular. The prisoners seemed to feel this way because the women were so young and because they 'simply came into the camp', whereas on the English side they were occasionally simply referred to as 'whores' amongst other things.[59] Newspapers often reported relationships between under-age girls and German POWs. There were several reports relating to escape attempts and consequent convictions, and the names and addresses of those involved were usually printed in full. In August 1947, a military court sentenced a 22-year-old German to one year hard labour in prison because he and a 16-year-old girl had wanted to run away together.[60] Soon after this, 2 German prisoners of war accompanied by 2 'young girls' managed to escape twice in 1 evening. They were first re-captured at a cinema in Thurso and taken back to their camp Watten Caithness. Two hours later, having forced open various doors, they were again re-united with the girls, who in the meantime had got hold of some food and shaving gear, and together they disappeared into the mist and darkness.[61] An account given to a court in Shropshire by a 16-year-old girl in September 1947 testified to just how difficult such an escape could be: They had lived on blackberries and raw carrots, and had been forced to drink from the water tanks of old barracks where they had taken refuge.[62]

Other articles reported the unlawful presence of women in the camps, the consequent legal investigations, the reasons given by the women and the eventual convictions, again publishing the full names of those concerned.[63] A final theme focussed on reporting the unhappy love affairs, the reactions of parents and the human tragedy that flowed from all this. One of these was the attempted suicide, using aspirin, of a 15-year-old girl. The reason given in the suicide note left was that it was all because her mother had refused her permission to marry Hans, and that now she feared he would be sent back to Germany. 'You think because he is German he is not a human.' She was found by Hans and taken to a hospital.[64] A further example involved an 18-month affair between an ex-German POW and a 17-year-old woman in Middlesex. It ended in death for the German, who was shot with a pistol during a struggle with the girl's father. A farewell letter to his sister in-law in Germany suggests that he had already planned suicide before the tragedy: 'As a German they point their fingers at me, Doreen's father included. It is hard to go out of the world, but still it must be he or I. Don't tell my mother, say I have had an accident. Without Doreen life would be impossible.'[65] We can only guess at the individual consequences of such unhappy relationships, the family problems that often accompanied them, the effect on friends and neighbours, and being publicly humiliated in the press. But even those British women whose contact with a German prisoner of war ended in marriage sometimes had to suffer condemnation from their communities.

Marriage between British women and German POWs was permitted from July 1947. This was preceded by questions in the House of Commons on 8 July by the MP Skeffington-Lodge, concerning the case of Werner Vetter who was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for having had a sexual relationship with a British woman. Skeffington-Lodge and other MPs argued that the POW should be allowed to marry the mother of his child, which a short while later he was permitted to do.[66] Afterwards, MP Leah Manning criticised the contradictory legal situation which allowed a British soldier

in Germany to marry a German woman but prevented a British woman in Britain marrying a German POW, saying that it was 'sex discrimination'.[67] In legal terms the day was a turning point, although a Home Office statement concerning its position on the matter made it clear that they did not wish to encourage such marriages. By marrying a German POW the wife lost her British nationality (this was then altered in 1948 with the Nationality Act), and she had no right to live with her husband while he remained in a camp or hostel under military supervision. Nor did the marriage protect the prisoner of war from repatriation to Germany, although as a British born subject, his wife could not be deported.[68]

By publishing the strict regulations in both English and German the government aimed to make these marriages no grounds for the right to residency in Britain (although with the passing of time this is what they became). This approach was supported by the Anglican Church, whose bishops advised against marriages between German POWs and British women, and occasionally even withheld ecclesiastical permission.[69] It was only in April 1948, shortly before all repatriation had been completed, that the government changed its policy and decided 'to consider sympathetically applications from German prisoners of war married to women of British stock who wish to obtain their release from prisoner of war status in this country'. Under the new ruling these prisoners found themselves with even greater freedom than their unmarried counterparts, since they were given the choice to choose their occupation, whilst unmarried civilian workers were still bound to work in agriculture.[70] The ruling gave many a prisoner, who would otherwise have been forcibly repatriated (because he could not prove he was employed on a farm, which by the end of 1948 had become a condition for remaining in Britain), a means of staying on. In December 1948, *The Lancashire Daily Post* even spoke of a 'rush by Germans to get married'.[71]

In total, 796 Germans married British women during their internment.[72] To this figure one must add marriages that took place after 1948, the exact number of which, although unknown, is likely to have been many times greater. Of the 20 ex-German POWs interviewed in connection with this study, 15 married British women, whilst 4 married German women.

Opportunities to start relationships depended greatly upon one's age. In the case of relatively young British/German couples, who got married during the years of internment or soon afterwards, organised dances played an important role. Until their relaxation, rules governing dress and freedom of movement presented something of a challenge for the prisoners.[73] At social occasions, and outside work generally, most prisoners paid great attention to their appearance. There was, in any case, plenty of time to organise civilian clothes or scented soap, and to take pride in one's wardrobe, so that over time the impression was created that the Germans were more 'respectably dressed' than their British guards or the local competition at dances.[74] Some borrowed civilian clothes from the relatives of girlfriends, or they were given coats, trousers or shoes by them as gifts. As a rule British women supported their boyfriends or fiancés by providing them with food, homemade cakes, cigarettes and money.

The POW was not always the active party in the initial contact. Occasionally a specifically targeted invitation to tea would provide the first basis for a couple to become acquainted. Some of those interviewed spoke of love (very occasionally mutual) at first sight, but most couples took their time before getting married. In one instance this took

place in a gaily decorated dining hall at a camp in Scotland in 1948,[75] but usually weddings were celebrated at the bride's family home with, especially in the immediate postwar years, the participation of a very curious local population: 'The church was full; because of all the propaganda etc. many people thought that Germans all had horns on their heads and so the whole church was packed with people who wanted to see.'[76]

Only on rare occasions did relationships and marriages between POWs and British women receive the backing of all friends, relatives and neighbours. Justus commented about the reactions of villagers and his future parents in-law: 'Finally it was like this, when my wife went home either nobody spoke to her or they would make remarks.'[77] In essence Jean, a Scottish girl who married Karl, also did so against her parents' will, even though she was 17 years old and under Scottish law women over 16 years could marry without their parents' consent. Eventually her parents insisted upon a 'respectable wedding' with a suitable celebration in an ostentatious effort to forestall disapproval from their social circle. But not all those invited actually attended: 'It was very difficult for some people to accept that this girl had married a German prisoner.' In another case it was a popular aunt who distanced herself from her niece—'if you marry a German, do not ever come to me again'—and sometimes one parent would have to be persuaded or convinced by their partner. Many of the ex-POWs remarks on the experience were along the lines of 'it took a while' or he was 'not overjoyed', or 'they did not shun me as such, but I rarely had a proper relationship with the family'.[78] Wholly positive statements about the initial reactions of families were few and far between.

Work

Outside the vast range of opportunities offered by leisure activities, the main source of contact that the prisoners had with the British public was through work carried out outside the camps. It is estimated that this amounted to a total of around 1.2 billion man-hours. Most of these hours were in the agricultural sector, but prisoners also carried out local clean-up operations, house and road building, and they worked in brick and flax factories, metal-working industries, scrap yards, dock yards, at army depots and air fields, in bomb disposal, and in many other areas with the exception of mining.[79] The wages were poor and initially the system was confusing, but things were relatively simple for employers who could request a certain number of prisoner for a certain number of hours, paying the standard hourly, daily or weekly rates of pay. The workers themselves saw very little of this money, most of which went to the state to cover the costs of accommodation, food and transport. Up until June 1946, prisoners could only officially work and be paid for a maximum of eight hours per day. In agriculture they received about six shillings for a 48-hour week, paid to them in tokens for use in the camp canteen only. In addition they were given two cigarettes per eight-hour day. Workers received 2,800 calories a day, all others 2,000. Those engaged in heavy manual work were given extra rations.[80]

In September 1946 wages were raised by three shillings, if the work was well done. Furthermore a bankbook was introduced. Employers were now able to pay additional wages which the prisoners could either save and use on their release or send home to Germany. This was introduced as a means to raise motivation and productivity even if, crucially, its voluntary nature remained in the hands of the employer. It is safe to assume

that both sides reached informal agreements on the payment. At the end of June 1947 prisoners were given the right to legally own British money. The rate of pay for a 48-hour working week was now nine shillings, half of which could be changed into sterling. Added to this, one could earn a bonus of up to six shillings, which would be paid into the above bank account.[81] By 1948 civilian workers were paid £4.10.0 for a 48-hour week. If they were still living in a camp they paid £1.10.0 for board and lodging to the relevant County War Agricultural Executive Committee.[82]

The money earned was extremely important as it allowed prisoners to make many very modest purchases. Also, one should not underestimate the opportunity money offered the prisoners to 'escape the idle camp atmosphere and barbed wire for hours at a time', to avoid 'the danger of camp rage' and to 'keep body and soul fit'. Many officers also volunteered to work for this reason.[83] 'You felt free out working', explained two ex-POWs to a reporter from the Edinburgh *Evening News* when re-visiting their camp at Amisfield in 1998.[84] In many respects work became a sort of therapy helping the POWs transition back into civilian life.[85] The contacts gained through work created the conditions for favours from locals and a little extra income. And as time went on, the legality of work done 'on the side' became less of an issue. 'At weekends we were not in the camp at all' recalled an ex-prisoner, 'the farmers picked us up, and others did too. They knew that the Germans could do everything for you. We were well-known and famous for it.'[86] Gardeners and craftsmen could earn a little extra cash in the evening, or at weekends on building sites 'where all the earnings went straight into the prisoners' pockets'.[87] Others made toys or slippers. Officially these could not be sold, but were sometimes offered for sale on the footpath in front of the building site. Few people asked where the materials had come from, all they were interested in was the price of these un-rationed goods. Homemade toys were also given to children's homes, hospitals and other such establishments, which went a long way to improving the image of prisoners in the eyes of the local community.[88]

One of the early perks enjoyed by prisoners working on farms was extra food and meals. This too was officially not allowed, but quite apart from the pity the sight of the prisoners' meagre rations sometimes produced, it was also in practice unavoidable if the farmer wanted to have a productive workforce for any length of time. Julie White, from Manor Farm in Inkpen near Newbury, was one of those that broke the rules: 'I received a notice from the Ministry of Agriculture, written in red, that we were not to feed the prisoners on any account and if we did their labour would be withdrawn. I was told that they had a cooked breakfast and a good evening meal and would be supplied with packed lunch sufficient for the day. The latter proved quite inadequate for men working hard out of doors, in fact, when the farm men stopped for "lunch" at 9:30am the prisoners stopped too and ate their meagre sandwiches then and there, so had nothing for the rest of the day. Unless I gave them some food at dinnertime.'[89]

The additional food was important, but it only raised productivity for a while. Soon many prisoners realised 'their value' and allowed themselves to be paid for their overtime in sterling.[90] Farmers who were financially able to offer such incentives tended to employ POWs rather than other foreign labour, particularly if the work was physically challenging.[91] However, sometimes the demands of the work proved too great. When a prisoner employed in a brick factory suffered heat stroke in the summer of 1947, a representative from the ICRC criticised the exceedingly harsh working conditions that

few Britons would tolerate. His investigation revealed that every two weeks the shifts were swapped from day to night and vice versa. This was totally incompatible with camp routine, as it did not allow the workers enough time to sleep during the day. Furthermore, the official found fault with the limited food ration and the rule that the prisoners had to remain at their work place at all times and, unlike other workers, were not allowed to decide when the temperature had become unbearable.[92]

As a rule, camp personnel and prisoners lodged on farms did better than those in camps, although some farmers exploited prisoners, sending them out to work in the rain with inadequate footwear or clothing. Other farmers were unpopular because of their 'interminably opinionated' attitudes.[93] But generally, it was the experiences of those such as Moritz that were the norm. To begin with, he and another prisoner were sent daily to work on a farm, and initially had to eat their meals in the barn. After three weeks they were allowed into the house, and after a further two weeks the farmer asked them if they would like to be quartered at the farm: 'And then we worked for our food and a bed to sleep in. Food and sleep, that was the main thing. And we ate at the table with the farmer and his wife as if we were their own sons.'[94]

The initial scepticism directed at the prisoners rapidly changed to trust. Relations with their British colleagues became equally good, although it should be remembered that the prisoners were seldom seen as competitors in the work place, as they generally worked at farms that locals found less appealing. It was unusual for British farming families to take their meals with their farm hands, but it was normal for them to eat with prisoners lodging with them. This was a result of the fact that the prisoners did not live in the village or in a cottage belonging to the farm, and therefore could neither bring along a packed lunch nor go home for dinner. This led to the development of close personal relationships, which in turn helped prisoners learn English and adapt to their new surroundings more quickly.[95] Often it was the older people on the farm or in the area, especially the women, whom the prisoners liked to talk to most, liked to spend their free time with, and with whom they felt 'like a son'.[96]

Occasionally relationships lasted decades, even if the ex-prisoners had stopped working in agriculture long ago or no longer lived in the area. Some carried their farmers to the grave.[97] A few even received a piece of land or had the whole farm made over to them, whilst others married the farmer's daughter: 'I arrived at this farm and the first person to greet me was a young woman. We were then shown the work we had to do, which was to harvest the hay. Oh that's easy, I thought, hay doesn't weigh a thing. And I was given a pitchfork. Henry, that was the farmer, showed us how to do it. He scooped the hay up onto the wagon with one masterly stroke. […] In the evening our hands were covered in calluses. After the hay harvest came the corn harvest. And then all the farmers received a circular letter, they could apply to have the prisoners quartered at the farm. They immediately made the request and quick as a flash I was quartered at the farm. The young woman became my wife. That is the reason why I stayed there.'[98]

Staying in Britain

For the majority of prisoners, marrying or the intention to marry was the most important reason for not returning to the continent. But for these prisoners, and others, marriage did not make it a foregone conclusion that they would stay for good. Instead, other migrants

continued to believe that they would remain for a limited period and then sooner or later return to Germany or travel further afield. When questioned about their motives many ex-prisoners responded by sharing their thinking at the time, which was along the lines of: 'Let's just stay one more year'. 'Let's do another year. We have already done eight, so one more is nothing'. 'Then my friend said: Let's stay here another year. And so here we stayed'.[99] Some ex-prisoners did leave after several years to return to Germany or resettle in a third country, but no British or German statistics recording the number exist. For those remaining, career, friends and partners in particular were the reasons not to return. Others neither could, nor wanted to go back. The official records give the impression that prisoners, originally from the Soviet zone of occupation in particular, but also from the former German territories in the east and from Eastern Europe, opted for civilian worker status. In the course of our research however, we also came across a relatively high number of ex-prisoners from the west of Germany who chose to stay. Of the 20 interviewed, 8 were originally from the west. A similar statistic is revealed in the Alien Register at Salford, which we will consider in greater detail later. It contains entries for 11 civilian workers, four of whom (i.e. over one-third) were from the western part of Germany. When talking about their reasons, some spoke of losing their parents or a parent (more often the mother): 'My mother died whilst I was a prisoner and then there was nothing left.'[100] Others, whilst on their 'release holiday', were encouraged by their families to remain in Britain because of the desperate situation in Germany at the time.[101]

POWs born in the area of Germany under Soviet occupation, or whose relatives now lived there, told of the fear circulating at the time; fear of 'ending up with the Russians' or of being deported to Siberia.[102] Several received letters from parents or relatives that advised, 'between the lines' or even openly, not to come home if at all possible.[103] Refugee families were in any case being forced to live together in the smallest of spaces. 'We lost everything', recalls Gerhard. 'My home was taken away, given to Poland. And my parents who remained in East Germany at that time, they lived in a little room with my brother and my sister. There were four people in that tiny room. And so my father actually asked me one day […] if it was possible for me to remain here, for a while at least.'[104]

Most of those interviewed gave several different reasons for their decision to stay, including the greater availability of food in Britain, better career opportunities, the new friends and acquaintances they had made, and the fact that they had become used to the British mentality and way of life.[105] For some, breaking up with or divorcing a partner in Germany played a vital role in their decision. This worked both ways; after years of being alone some wives and girlfriends put an end to the relationship, as did some of the prisoners when they decided not to return. This latter issue in particular was raised by several clergymen, who criticised the married prisoners who decided to stay, even when this was done to support their family back home.[106] Another report warned of the moral dangers of British women 'holding on' to married or unmarried German prisoners and thus preventing their return to their nearest and dearest.[107] Occasionally this reportedly resulted in bigamy, psychiatric illness and attempted suicide.[108] For some of the ethnic-German prisoners there was the added problem of families living in eastern Europe. They may have been prevented from leaving their homelands or may even have been deported to the Soviet Union. In some cases they had heard nothing for years, and in others the news may have been 'shocking'.[109] The letters they received from relatives contained

similar warnings to those from the Soviet zone: 'Do not return to your old home towns and villages.'[110] Finally, there were certainly also many exmembers of the SS and German armed forces who wished to lie low for as long as possible to avoid prosecution under German or international law for war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Not all prisoners who wanted to stay in Britain were allowed to do so. Residency was acquired in two stages: the first stage involved temporary residency until 31 December 1948, which lasted in the second stage the exprisoner received an unrestricted permit. In this way the number of civilian workers was reduced from 24,000 to 15,000. No common criteria were established for deciding who could stay. If a prisoner was already quartered at a farm, it was usually sufficient for the farmer to fill out an application form at the relevant County War Agricultural Executive Committee offices. The press had already publicised this possibility in May 1947.[111] In addition, committees were set up in the camps. These were made up of the British camp commander, a representative from both the County Committee and the German section of the Foreign Office, a doctor, the German camp leader and a POW.[112] At smaller meetings the camp commander and representatives from both the local labour exchange and the Foreign Office alone would make the decision. There were also no strict guidelines for the selection procedure, although the involvement of state representatives did lead to the emergence of some criteria. These included good behaviour and work record, character, personal motives and family background.[113] Several committees also evaluated political attitudes, since early War Office proposals were based upon the view that no applicant who was graded category B or below should be considered.[114] On the other hand, being an ex-member of the SS was considered no handicap.[115] Information concerning applicants who were turned down is sketchy. In a camp in Yorkshire 210 prisoners were interviewed, 69 of whom were deemed unsuitable. Whereas at a hostel in Essex, 32 of the 64 interviewed were accepted.[116]

In life terms the decision to stay in Britain was monumental, and yet for those who took it the moment has hardly remained in their memory. It appears to have been just another unspectacular event in the long-term process of acclimatisation that was accompanied by short- and medium-term plans for the future. It did not occur to any of those interviewed to offer a full account of the procedures involved. When asked about the process the replies were often vague: 'You only had to apply', 'it was just a couple of forms, I think', 'the farmer did it all', 'then we had to go and see the commandant'.[117]

At the beginning of the second phase, in late September 1948, there were a total of 23,729 civilian workers in Britain. England and Wales accounted for 19,540 of these, of which 11,214 lived on farms. In Scotland there were 4,189, of whom 2,051 were on farms.[118] At this stage there were still 120 camps and hostels in operation around the country.[119] After the second phase, the selection of those eligible for unlimited residency began. To qualify applicants needed to show a work contract they had made with a farmer. They also had to commit to staying in the agricultural sector for what was then still an unspecified period.[120] Despite this, more wanted to stay than could be accepted. Only in exceptional cases, for example, one that a member of the ICRC reported in Yorkshire in October 1947,[121] was an applicant turned down because of local resentment. Occasionally the offices in one area tried to find jobs for the surplus of applicants in another area.[122] Reports from ICRC delegates on their visits to the hostels, in which the

civilian workers were housed, suggest that from September 1948 on, the atmosphere in many places was one of waiting to see if one could secure a work contract on a farm.[123]

Operation Repat began at the end of November for all those who wished to return home to Germany or who had failed to gain permission to stay in Britain. The returnees were transported en masse to a transit camp at Harwich. From there they were sent to Münster in Germany via the Hook of Holland for formal release. In total 11 transport ships left Harwich, the first of which sailed on the 23 November, and the last on the 13 December.[124] Some members of the Ministry of Agriculture appeared to have been particularly worried about the British leg of the journey. They were concerned that workers 'who were not granted permission to stay here, might take the matter into their own hands, leave the train en route and disappear'.[125] Initial reports appeared to prove them right, with 284 civilian workers arriving late in Harwich.[126] In March 1949, there were still 50 Germans who had evaded repatriation and were then liable for deportation by the Home Office.[127]

Finally, migrants could either remain directly in Britain, that is to say waive their formal release in Germany (this option did not entirely comply with strict Geneva Convention regulations), or they could take four weeks leave in Germany, the start of which coincided with their formal release. Those who chose not to go on leave totalled 8,370, whereas 7,884 civilian workers did go between 15 December 1948 and 14 January 1949, and on 3 and 19 February 1949. By 10 March 1949, 7,279 had returned to Britain. Many had hoped to be home in Germany for Christmas, but were disappointed as the continuing shipping shortage caused great logistical problems that affected channel crossings.[128]

As shown by Table 3, following their leave 15,649 civilian workers stayed in Britain with unrestricted residency permits. But the below survey is by no means accurate as not all of the County War Agricultural Executive Committees were contacted and the figures in the bottom row are estimates.[129] Information concerning workers who remained in Germany also varies. The table reveals that 605 workers did not return to Britain. However, in 1955 the Ministry of Agriculture put the figure at 523 (418 from England and Wales, and 105 from Scotland). As a basis for their calculations they used the special accounts into which workers wishing to travel first had to pay £1. This was to ensure that they had some money on their return.[130]

Table 3 Repatriations, leave and return journeys to Britain, December 1948-March 1949

	England and Wales	*Scotland*	*Total*
Repatriated	6,244	1,583	7,863
Sent on leave	6,356	1,194	7,884
Returned from leave	5,880	1,087	7,279
Remained without leave	6,630	1,394	8,370

Source: PRO HO 213.1133, Operation Repat. Note by MAF, 16.3.1949.

Preparations for home visits were undertaken by a number of charitable organisations in Germany. Particular efforts were made to find lodgings for civilian workers who had originally come from East Germany. Within a short space of time the Westphalian branch of the German Red Cross had received offers of ‘almost 5,000 holiday vacancies in guest houses, hotels, hostels, convalescent homes etc. in various parts of all the German states […]; included in these were approximately 1,000 free offers, for those returnees who were impoverished’. However, very few people took up these offers. By the beginning of January 1949, the German Red Cross had only managed to place 100 people in accommodation.[131] Most of the returnees chose to use their time visiting relatives, friends and acquaintances. Those who did not have any relatives in the west visited former comrades, or crossed into the Soviet zone illegally, or met others who had crossed the green border from the Soviet zone into the West.[132]

War brides

During the war-torn twentieth century, war brides comprised a significant part of international migration. In the years immediately following the Second World War about 100,000 left Britain alone, taking their 50,000 children with them to follow partners to the USA and Canada.[133] In comparison, the approximately 10,000 Germans who married a member of the British Army or Control Commission appears relatively modest. German-British couples, however, were seen in the streets, parks and dance floors immediately after the end of hostilities. ‘Fraulein’ entered the English language first, and shortly after the German women themselves entered British households. According to Elvira, a war bride from West Berlin, three quarters of her class mates—particularly those who were ‘a bit cleverer’—had an English boyfriend: ‘The English men went for them, they were completely mad for German women.’[134] Even half a century later, Elvira differentiated between the combat troops who ‘were considerate, they had seen the situation and what we went through’, and soldiers who arrived later: ‘They boasted, they were not as nice.’ She also remembered nylon stockings, chocolate and the hunger of those years, as well as the fact that many of them were married.

Not all relationships lasted or resulted in marriage. Often the consequences were children born out of wedlock, with men the women hardly knew and could not trace for child support. In 1947 and again in 1951 the bishops of the Church of England raised the matter with the government.[135]

Against the background of post-war Germany’s struggling economy, an acquaintance or relationship with an allied soldier—particularly an American or British soldier—had practical advantages. It provided access to food and luxury items such as chocolate, soap, coffee, tea and cigarettes, the latter being the most important currency on the black market. The allied soldiers also had the ‘aura of victory’ about them. They were in control of the country and represented power and strength, and they wore clean uniforms and appeared well groomed in contrast to the German men who were fewer in number and often raggedly dressed. Even decades later first impressions of the allied soldiers were remembered in glowing terms: ‘And for the first time on the paths which had been cleared through the rubble I saw these figures which I regarded as coming from a different star. They were allied soldiers and officers. Beautifully dressed, groomed and

smelling wonderful. And in contrast, we looked so completely neglected. And they went out with German girls who also looked so beautiful.'[136]

Contact with allied soldiers often helped raise self-esteem. Girlfriends shared some of the privileges, were distinguished from the masses and felt somehow chosen. However, the ambitions of some led to envy and rejection by others and a German phrase common at the time was: 'German men have completely lost their courage, German women have lost their sense of shame.'[137] Some lost the respect of their families or neighbours and were accused of prostituting themselves: 'One even heard that they are the women who do it for chocolate and cigarettes.'[138] This mistrust was not only felt by Germans. In June 1947, US General McNarney worried about 'the amount of pro-Nazi propaganda the occupation force was "swallowing unwittingly"'.[139] And some delegates at the conference of the National Council of Women in Hastings in 1948 also raised concerns about the moral dangers that soldiers were confronted with. For them, access to alcohol was a secondary worry. They thought German women 'very easy meat' who would regard 'our boys as free meal tickets'.[140]

At the beginning of July 1947, stereotypes of a different sort were broadcast on German radio in a programme titled 'What do German women expect from a young German man?' 'The majority of the girls, about 70 per cent, answered the question that the German man should not feel so sorry for himself, but instead should stand with both feet firmly on the ground and get on with life. As a reason for the frequency of relationships between German girls and allied soldiers, most answered that the allied men were more chivalrous than young German men. Furthermore not so tired and listless. […] The young German man was unable to offer anything, he had become a lout during the war and showed no attempt to get rid of his military manners. Furthermore the American had "black hair", suits that fitted and perfect manners.'[141] It is not hard to imagine why this broadcast would have generated some anger.

For thousands of German-British couples, August 1946 brought a long-awaited change. Marriage was now possible even if for soldiers it meant overcoming a series of bureaucratic hurdles and enduring a six-month wait. Local military commanders were authorised to grant permission to marry if there were no security objections or other reservations, if all necessary controls and medical checks had been carried out and the required documents had been completed. During this six-month waiting period the applicant had to go to Britain for at least three weeks to discuss his plans with his family. Many took their future brides with them for the visit and introduced her to their families.[142] The German women had to apply for an exit permit before going and then received a temporary visa. Each case was examined individually by the Home Office which was responsible for dealing with 'enemy nationals'.[143] If the future British husband was already in Britain, because his unit had been moved or he had been released from the Army, he had to confirm in writing that he was a British subject living in Britain and promise to marry his fiancée. He also had to declare that there were no legal objections and that a wedding would take place immediately following his fiancée's arrival. The information had to be confirmed by a person in a public position, a doctor for example. Having completed the documentation the prospective bride could then apply for an exit permit and a visa.[144] The latter was usually limited to a few weeks and was withdrawn if the wedding did not take place. Prior to 31 December 1948, the wife automatically received British citizenship, irrespective of where the wedding actually took place.

Following the introduction of the British Nationality Act, from 1 January 1949 any German-born wife wishing to obtain British citizenship had to apply to the Home Office.[145]

Besides the official channels many other methods were used to get fiancées to Britain and marry more quickly. In one instance recorded in May 1946, a British officer very nearly succeeded in smuggling his fiancée into Britain in a British uniform.[146] Others tried to avoid paying the fare to the UK by joining a labour recruitment scheme, and then leaving the job shortly afterwards to get married. Such abuses were difficult to detect, and even when they were, not easy to act against, as in the case of a mother of two who started work in a hospital in September 1948, got married in February 1949, and then left her job to have her third child.[147] In April 1950, the *Bolton Evening News* quoted a British official who was of the opinion that most German women, 'with half an eye for a British husband', proceeded to get recruited for work. At the time about 40 women a month were leaving their jobs to get married: 'Many of the girls were of much better social standing than their profession would suggest.'[148] Sixty years later it is impossible to examine statistically the assumption that many of the recruited women consciously accepted a temporary social and economic demotion in the hope of long-term improvement. Material interests might have played an important role for some, but for others, love or the desire to leave Germany may have been the key factor for getting married.

It is difficult to generalise about the extent to which personal circumstances influenced the decision to leave Germany. The wartime experiences of many women were indeed shocking, particularly those who came from the eastern territories as refugees. Of the 14 women we interviewed, 7 were refugees. Their stories include hunger, hardship, illness and rape. Petty theft to get food was part of everyday life. They were often faced with an intolerant local population, both in the Soviet zone and in the western zones. Some couples were separated by the war and the iron curtain for years before being able to get divorced and legalise another relationship. Widows were looking for a partner for themselves and a father for their children, which was very difficult given the severe shortage of men. Women were often motivated by the fear of ending up alone, and a strong desire to get married and have children at a young age. Traditional role patterns were coupled with old-fashioned and ambivalent National Socialist ideas which, although on the wane, were still prevalent. Women also acted for very pragmatic reasons. For example, Emma summarised her expectations of marriage and emigrating to Britain in the following way: 'I just didn't want to be hungry any more.' For others it was the loss of their home: 'My *Heimat* had gone, why should I stay?'—'Perhaps it was because I didn't have a home any more that I thought now I am going to create a new one.'[149]

Such statements should not obscure the fact that possibilities for intimate contact between Germans and Britons were limited throughout the entire period of occupation. Big cities certainly offered numerous leisure facilities that were frequented by the allied forces, such as dances, clubs, cafes and cinemas. However, the majority of the women interviewed met their partners by chance or at work, and often in much sought-after jobs, in either the administrative or supply divisions of the Army or the Control Commission. The advantage of such jobs was that, apart from a rather good wage, there was always the possibility of receiving some extra food or cigarettes. They also offered the opportunity to acquire or improve English language skills. 'One had to take what was offered',

remembered Elvira, who got a job as a waitress.[150] Hedwig worked in a Navy Army and Air Force Institute (NAAFI) kitchen: 'Sometimes I cooked, did the washing up, peeled potatoes, cleaned and served the soldiers; […] and there I met my husband.'[151] Lisbeth started as a cleaner. At first she scrubbed the floors, 'then you got promoted'. After a while she worked as a cashier in a sergeant's mess, where she met her partner.[152] And finally, Paula met her future husband while working in a British Missing Persons office. 'That was wonderful. There we got some bread to start with, white bread, which we hadn't seen in our life before. I could only compare it with cake, a memory of my childhood. We got so much food that I was able to avoid using my ration card and could buy foodstuff for my mother and send it to her in Dresden in a parcel.'[153] In other cases it was largely coincidence. The requisition of somebody's house by a member of the Military Government, 'including the people who lived in it'[154], for example, or a meeting in a cafe, on the street or in a park.

The Channel crossing was usually by way of the Control Commission's steamer service from Cuxhaven to Tilbury. Others travelled via Belgium using scheduled flights, or the specially arranged Bride Service between Hamburg and Croydon that was provided by several small airlines.[155] Some, like Emma, organised their own journey. She travelled on a freight ship from Hamburg to Hull and 50 years later still went into raptures about the meals on board: 'The steward came in with a huge bowl of tomato soup which smelled wonderful. We finished the whole tureen and it was a big one. We wondered how we would ever pay for it. I was the cheeky one who said: They cannot take away what we have already eaten, even if we have to do the washing up. Then the steward came back and asked us whether we had had enough soup. "Yes, and it was very nice." And then he brought fish. Wonderful, and after that a steak. Even today I am a bit angry that we had so much soup because then he said he would bring the trolley. I thought he meant the trolley to clear up, but no he came with a trolley full of pudding but none of us was able to eat any more, [laughing] […] And when we were near Helgoland, in the middle of the night, the steward came in again to serve us hot chocolate and biscuits.'[156] This was a far more comfortable way of travelling than the British military transport that Isedore and a dozen other war brides experienced. They were not allowed to leave their cabins due to the large male presence on board.[157]

As a journalist from the *Manchester Guardian* observed in 1947, the war brides' arrival in Tilbury was a fairly low-key affair. His report noted that most were extremely young and dressed cheaply, 'in a kind of pathetic finery'. He also commented on the uncertainty as to whether they would really be met by their fiancés that was reflected in their faces, although 'most of them were' met.[158] Those who were not, had to return to Germany. Others decided to leave because they could not bear being separated from their families, particularly if a family member was ill.[159] Some were disappointed with Britain and its people, or with the fiancé or his family. This mainly applied to women who had left Germany completely unprepared and who had not made a preparatory visit. 'They did not know what they were doing', said a former British officer who dealt with applications: 'They submitted the application, then they were checked and asked some questions, such as how their future husband earned his living and they could not answer. They had no clue. In those first few years they just wanted to leave. Many of these returned to Germany later on. Nothing kept them here for long.'[160] Disappointment and disillusionment was most common amongst women who came to Britain with no

knowledge of the country, who assumed that the privileges they enjoyed through association with an allied soldier would continue or even increase in peace-time Britain, and who had high expectations that could not be met in everyday life. In view of their positive experiences with the British in Germany, possible antipathy towards Germans, as a result of the war, was often completely overlooked. Despite intensive war propaganda, most war brides saw Britain and its people in a very positive light: 'I did not think about how I would survive this as a German.'[161]

The stories about the weddings are similar to those of several POWs, although 50 years on we cannot be certain if this is the result of popular stereotypes of the late 1940s or of images popularised by the media in the intervening decades. For example, Isedore remembers very vividly the vicar's comment: 'Thank you my dear, my church has never been so full.' Everybody wanted to see the German girl, if she has horns. Obviously, nobody had reckoned with such curiosity. One neighbour had even promised: 'I'll sit on your side, darling, even if I am the only one.'[162] When Edeltraud got married the churchgoers were not so much interested in horns as in swastikas: 'At our wedding the church was absolutely full. Afterwards it was said they came to see whether my wedding dress was perhaps decorated with swastikas or whether I had plaits, blonde plaits, like the cliché of a German girl.'[163] The first few weddings of a local to a German raised particular interest and warranted detailed reports in local newspapers, sometimes with a photograph. A lot of publicity was given to double weddings, as when two brothers from Bolton got married to two sisters from Osnabrück, or when two cousins from Perth had a joint wedding with their 'Fraulein brides' from Münster and Hamburg.[164] These reports were free of any anti-German comments. They only remarked on small deviances from the local customs or any particular circumstances. For example, when the wedding dress was borrowed from another German bride who had very recently worn it herself, or when there was a war bride from the First World War amongst the guests, or when the couple exchanged rings according to German custom and the Anglican priest said a few words in German.[165] Ceremonies were usually carried out in English, and then it was not always certain that the bride understood it: 'I didn't know a word of English. […] And the official said I should repeat what my husband was saying, but I couldn't even do that. […] And afterwards the official said strictly speaking we were not really married because I hadn't understood what was going on.'[166]

Compared to the extensive bureaucratic procedures that were necessary in Germany, getting married in Britain was much easier. Notice of an intended marriage was much shorter, and sometimes, only a few days elapsed between the decision to get married and the wedding: 'Later I understood how easy it was to enter bigamy' said Mechthild 'because all I needed was a birth certificate and my passport.'[167] The number of couples who lived in bigamous relationships is uncertain, but the topic was mentioned by several interviewees. Some raised it as a general issue, others knew of a previous marriage and that their husbands were not divorced. There are only occasional references to this topic in contemporary newspaper articles and other written sources,[168] and there is a dearth of information on separations, divorces, women returning to Germany or onward migration to third countries. According to the few documents available many couples clearly had big problems in their marriage.[169]

Written sources and interviews undertaken for this study indicate that the reasons for marital problems lay mainly in the partners' different expectations of married life and the

brides' disillusionment with the social and economic status of their husbands in peace time. Regarding the latter, the *Bolton Evening News* talked of differences in 'social standing'.[170] The words of an interviewee explain this phrase well: 'Couples who came from the same social class as their husbands [...] had it easier. [...] Many girls married beneath their social class and when they came to England, they realised the difference. [...] They either adapted to that level or difficulties appeared.'[171] Such a remark should not be taken as cultural arrogance but rather as a sign of the suppression of social expectations and social pressures when the couple first met, and which only became apparent after a period in Britain. If they wanted the marriage to survive these differences, there was often no alternative but 'to grit your teeth and somehow carry on'.[172] There was no lack of official warnings to prospective wives to get information about their future husband's financial situation,[173] but the question as to how this advice should best reach the young women remained unanswered. The tempting prospect of escaping the misery of post-war Germany with a 'smart English soldier' probably meant many prospective brides turned a blind eye to rational analysis of their fiancé's social and economic circumstances.[174]

The housing shortage in Britain was an additional problem, as many newly married couples were unable to live in a home of their own. As before, it is difficult to generalise. When some of the interviewed women stated that they had a better relationship with their father-in-law than with their mother-in-law, the reason is surely not only linked to the fact that the in-laws were British. A competitive attitude on the part of mothers-in-law towards their sons' wives was sometimes mentioned as a reason for tension by the interviewees. Besides this age-old complaint, which also involved comments on the loss of their only son or criticism of the new bride's housekeeping abilities, several references were made to specific anti-German feelings: 'I noticed immediately they didn't like me, firstly because I was a German, and I am sure about that, and secondly because I deprived her of her favourite son.'[175] But several war brides did talk about a friendly, even warm, welcome from their new families, and about a good marriage. Difficulties in the very early stages were often attributed to the lack of privacy many newly wedded couples experienced when forced by circumstances to live in a small room in their in-law's home. Sometimes this led to 'nasty conflicts'.[176]

War, occupation and a return to Britain also marked the lives of the British husbands and subsequently had an impact on some marriages. The case of the British officer who had to give up his dream of becoming a diplomat when he decided to marry his German bride[177] is perhaps a more obvious example of what countless other men—who noticed only later the extent to which those war years had shaped or changed them—experienced. For them returning from the continent constituted much more than a geographical change. They also lost the status and image associated with their uniform or connection with the Control Commission that they had enjoyed while in Germany. Access to a range of foodstuffs and other items that most of the population could only dream of had—through German eyes anyway—put the soldiers in a special position. Back in Britain, not only did they lose their uniforms but often some of their status and prestige as well. They were still part of an existing class system, with more clearly defined values and attitudes, and many had problems re-adjusting. As a result, marriages suffered. The civilian life that replaced the ordered, military structure demanded a new outlook, and for some it led to feelings of emptiness. The country had also changed during the war years. Civilian skills

and abilities were now more important than military ones, both in the work place and outside it. The banal reality of everyday life in Britain extinguished the aura soldiers had in Germany.

Women of the North Sea scheme

When POWs and war brides are excluded from the statistics, the Germans migrating to Britain immediately after the war were mainly women coming to work. There were 1,378 ethnic-German women and 1,304 Sudeten Germans recruited under the Westward Ho Scheme, approximately 10,000 women employed under the North Sea scheme, and 20,000 women who came on individual labour permits.

Women of very different socio-economic backgrounds were attracted by the advertising campaigns in Germany.[178] Quite a few came from middle class families and had spent several years in higher education. Some talked about childhood dreams of becoming a doctor or a teacher, and three women had actually started university courses. Four others had intended to become a nurse, a journalist, a photo laboratory assistant and a fashion designer, respectively. The war, flight, expulsion and deportation had forced several to interrupt their education. The interviewees ranged from only children to those from large families with up to ten children. Whereas the latter came predominantly from families in rural areas, the women from small families mainly grew up in urban and well-educated circles. A feature that the older women had in common was that as part of the gender-specific socialisation process during the Nazi-period, they had spent a compulsory year in a household or working on a farm.

Political reservations about going to Britain so soon after the war were not mentioned, and the interviewees did not express mistrust or criticism of the British. Apparently the German war propaganda had not resulted in scepticism or anti-British feelings. On the contrary, the presence of British soldiers was seen as positive. This also corresponds with the results of an early post-war opinion-poll in which more than two-thirds regarded the British positively, and described them using terms such as: ‘intelligent, self-controlled, practical, progressive, generous, peace-loving, hard working and brave’.[179]

Motives

The reasons why thousands of women left Germany in such a short space of time, either temporarily or permanently, are as varied as the life stories of the migrants themselves. They had their roots in both material and emotional circumstances, and were accompanied by an equally diverse range of expectations. In her study on the migration of German maids to the USA, Silke Wehner stated that the desire to found a family was an important aim for many of these migrants.[180] The evidence of similar motives can be found in post-war Britain. ‘German Girls Seek British Husbands’ was the title of an article that appeared in the *Bolton Evening News* on 15 April 1950. Traditional stereotypes of man-hunting female migrants, together with the knowledge that there was indeed a lack of men in Germany, make this assumption appear plausible. And one or two of the interviewed women certainly mentioned this as a motive for leaving Germany: ‘Secretly I had hoped to find a husband.’[181] For most women though, there were initially

more important things to consider than a family. Later on, however, it was their family that became the main reason for staying in Britain, for extending the intended temporary migration into permanent residency.

Reporting on her work in the British Ministry of Labour, German sociologist Maria Roos[182] divided domestic helpers working in Britain into five categories. The first group consisted of women, many of whom were refugees, widows and divorcees, who wished to build a new life abroad. The second group was made up of women who wanted to learn or improve their English, or develop other skills in order to improve their job prospects on returning to Germany. Third, there were women who had worked for the allied forces and wanted to put their acquired language skills into practise. Some of them were also motivated by disappointment with the wages and working conditions in Germany. The fourth group were 'girls who wanted to have a good time in England'. According to Maria Roos, these were the women who had not had 'an orderly family life in Germany' or who 'had experienced such awful things that one felt sympathetic towards them, rather than regarding their attitude as lacking a strength of character'. Finally, the fifth group consisted of a small number of 'charming middle-aged widows', who worked in well-to-do households and wanted 'to be treated as ladies', sometimes with the intention of getting married.[183]

The reasons given in many contemporary news reports and in the interviews we recorded correspond with Maria Roos' categories. Learning English, which had new status due to its role in Germany's economic consolidation, was a particularly important motive and was frequently mentioned as a motive for migration.[184] This phenomenon was already noticeable in the early post-war years, although it ranked lower than material motives. A few women also saw Britain as a springboard for further migration to Canada, America, South Africa and Australia.[185]

Material expectations were a result of the difficult conditions in Germany at the time. In this sense they were defined negatively: Britain should provide everything that Germany was unable to offer, and help overcome the terrible living conditions they had come from. Material considerations overlapped with other reasons, and it was often a combination of different motives that resulted in the decision to go. Britain provided the opportunity to leave many unpleasant experiences and memories behind: pain and suffering endured during the war, horrifying rapes that the women had seen or experienced, suicides of close relatives, the burning of swastikas into the foreheads of young women, expulsion and deportation, disrupted training and schooling, harassment as refugees, and the 'foreign rabble'.[186] The personal histories of several women included the death of close relatives, mothers, fathers or brothers, and the break-up of families. Being an orphan in a refugee camp was described as akin to 'not having a home', and another cited having 'to live with unknown people' while her mother was held in the Soviet zone.[187] Some did not live with their parents because they had only been allocated one room. Others were without jobs, and forced to share cramped quarters with other unemployed people without a chance of any privacy. It was not uncommon for parents or step-parents to put direct or indirect pressure on children to leave home.[188]

A number of women saw emigrating as a chance to free their family of a mouth to feed and wanted to support their loved ones from abroad: 'I saved really hard so I could help them', Heide said of the beginning of her time in Lancashire.[189] Other women were more focussed on themselves. They intended to do their A-levels abroad so that they

would be able to go to university. Sometimes it was a case of trying to get away from their parents' strict regime, or away from a man they were supposed to marry, while a few wanted to spend a period abroad because they were unable to get work in Germany due to their previous membership in Nazi organisations.[190] Finally there was a group of women who consciously wanted to break with the past: 'I simply wanted to leave everything behind, I wanted to start anew, I did not want to stay in my home country, I was too disappointed. And politically, we were the invincible and then suddenly everything was in ashes. And the re-education, I did not like that.'[191] Many expressed the feeling of wanting to break away but did not know how to put it into words. They often used stock phrases such as: 'I was always interested in foreign countries.'[192] Behind this lay the urge to get away, to take control of their lives and a consciously different direction from the National Socialist past and conventions. There was a desire to escape the hopelessness and misery of their situation: 'I simply wanted to live', Margarete said of her feelings. 'I wanted to own my life, I wanted to feel how life really was, how it feels when you do things yourself, I wanted to experience, to be responsible.'[193]

Recruitment

For the British government, the recruitment of foreign labour involved a heavy financial commitment. By the end of October 1948, selecting the labour force, transporting, housing and caring for amounted to £2.75 million, the equivalent of £30 per head.[194] Different procedures were developed for the different schemes. Recruiting DPs under Westward Ho was the least costly because potential applicants were already living in camps and could be specifically targeted for selection. The Ministry of Labour established a central office in Lemgo specifically for this purpose, as well as regional offices in Kiel, Hanover and Düsseldorf. Furthermore, a collecting centre was set up in each German *Land* of the British zone. The transit camp was initially in Seedorf, where the transfer from Cuxhaven to Hull or Tilbury began. Later, journeys started in Minister for the passage via the Hook of Holland to Tilbury. About 25 staff from the Ministry of Labour were responsible for the selection process, while the administrative staff was provided by the Control Commission.[195]

Recruitment consisted of several steps. First of all information was provided within the camps. The four-page brochure *Westward Ho* was certainly the most widely distributed publication of this type. It contained basic information on wages and working conditions, accommodation, rationing, social security and the criteria for immigration.[196] Initially the text was in both English and German. Later editions also appeared in several eastern European languages. An official from the Ministry of Labour would then visit the camp and invite interested DPs to an information evening. They would be asked to fill in and sign the last page of the brochure and submit it to the camp headquarters. When a set quota was reached, the official would return and carry out interviews to check the suitability of applicants and make confidential suggestions about potential work opportunities on a personal record card. The camp doctor would then conduct an initial medical check, and send his report and the personal record card to the regional office.[197] Those who passed the first assessment interview and the medical examination were moved to a collecting camp, where transportation to the transit camps was arranged. Here the applicants were further checked for infectious diseases and pregnancy. The final

security check was carried out by a representative of the Home Office, who also recorded work and residency conditions on the applicants' identity cards. The recruited persons received pocket money for their journey. Initially this was about 5 shillings, but later it was increased to £1. Where necessary, the DPs were also provided with clothes.

The recruitment of German women for the North Sea scheme was carried out differently and involved the German labour offices. They forwarded information and advertising material to interested women and tried to draw attention to the recruitment scheme by putting up posters.[198] Sometimes members of staff wrote to potential recruits. Adverts appeared in the press and on the radio, and posters were displayed in public buildings or other prominent places.[199] In addition, the local labour offices also checked the applicants' formal criteria, in particular their age, family status and length of residence in the zone. They collected the signed application forms and filled out two personal record cards for each applicant. Furthermore, they were in charge of checking that the applicants handed in two character references from respectable citizens, preferably a medical doctor or a pastor. At the same time the employment offices asked for police records. The completed documents were then passed on to the main employment office for that particular *Land,* which forwarded them to the Regional Labour Officers and the regional Chief Manpower Officer. At this point responsibility passed back to the main employment offices. Here, dates and locations of interviews for interested women were arranged, and translators provided if necessary.

Today the migrants have only scattered memories of the recruitment process, a radio advertisement, for example: 'My sister came running to me telling me what she had heard in the radio, that they were looking for workers in England. That was our chance.'[200] Others got to know about the scheme through newspapers or posters: 'Such a big poster with a nurse in a white hat on it, I remember that well.'[201] In contrast, memories of the interview have faded; only fragments were remembered, such as the fact that the British officer wore civilian clothes and that he spoke 'German without any accent at all'.[202] Other details remembered were the brevity of the interview, the credulity of the British officers[203] and relief that the political check was not at all strict: 'I feared that my membership [in the National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (NSDAP)] would destroy my plans but that was not the case. I was waiting and waiting but no one asked me these questions.'[204] Apparently the British officers relied completely on the German references and the information provided by the German police. They were obviously more interested in formalities such as age, place of birth and physical condition, in qualifications and former work places. 'The question was: Where had we worked before, but politically they didn't really bother us.'[205] In many cases a thorough political examination would not have made much sense since many applicants were not even 18 when they applied to go to Britain and hence would have only experienced the National Socialist era as children. They still needed the signature of their parents in order to leave for Britain. Finally, the medical examination was remembered as a very unpleasant experience: 'That was very humiliating. They were all Jewish doctors and we were very young girls and we had to parade in front of them, only dressed in our knickers. They wanted to see from our breasts whether we were pregnant or not. And then they even touched us. That was really insulting. Somehow, we were all very ashamed.'[206]

None of the surviving written sources provide any detailed information as to how the interviews were carried out. Nor are there any explanations of why women were turned

down, apart from health reasons, pregnancy, or if they were obviously more interested in finding a husband than working in Britain.[207] In November 1948, 940 out of 5,400—about a fifth—applying for the North Sea scheme had been rejected.[208] In addition, about 20 per cent who had successfully applied later withdrew.[209] No figures exist for the percentage of Sudeten Germans who were rejected. It is assumed that the numbers would have been relatively small in view of the severe labour shortage in the British cotton industry and the relatively low interest shown for work in this industry. Rejection was not necessarily the end of the road for those wanting to enter Britain, and equally, women who themselves decided to withdraw from the scheme did not necessarily stay in Germany. There was still the possibility of getting an individual labour permit. In effect, the British government was competing against itself: Those who were recruited through government schemes had to commit themselves to hard work in the health system or the constraints of living in a household. The idea of working in a hospital for mentally ill people or patients with tuberculosis held little appeal for some women, as did living on a farm, miles from the nearest town, and single-handedly looking after a large family.

In comparison, an individual labour permit offered the prospect of getting a job in a well-to-do private household, preferably in London, where the work might even be shared amongst several domestic staff. It is therefore not surprising that the North Sea scheme was most successful before there were alternative ways of getting to Britain. In the first four days following the announcement alone, there were 1,500 applicants.[210] However, the longer the scheme ran the more difficult it became to fill the places. An early indication that this would happen was a comment in February 1948 from a member of the Control Commission. He reported that all Britons in Germany, 'from General Bishop downwards', made efforts to hire a German domestic for home, usually via the old boy network.[211] As government schemes lost their appeal, interest in private and individually organised work places increased. In April 1949, British officials involved in recruiting had great difficulty bringing just 400 German women to Britain, whereas the monthly average for non-organised labour permits issued to domestic workers during this period was between 600 and 800, and recipients included women who had previously been rejected by the North Sea scheme.[212]

The journey

Amongst the numerous camps administered by the British Military Government, UNRRA and German authorities for various purposes and population groups, three were of particular importance for German recruits: The Assembly Centre in Hanover for domestics and war brides, the Assembly Centre Lincoln Barracks in Münster for DPs (and also for Sudeten Germans until it closed in September 1949), and finally, the Assembly Centre Mecklenbeck nr. Münster for women of the North Sea scheme, and later also for the Sudeten Germans.[213]

During the early post-war years, regular transport services remained severely disrupted, if they were running at all. The Hanover camp offered women travelling with individual labour permits and pre-paid tickets temporary accommodation and other forms of assistance. In 1949, a recruit for private domestic work gave an account of her experience: 'Our employer paid our travel costs to the travel agent […] in London. They in turn, organised our whole journey very well. We had to assemble in Hanover on 29

August. There we stayed at the transit house for a day, where we were well looked after, free of charge. During this time we were examined by a doctor, our luggage was checked by customs, we were given our Dutch transit visas and any further documents we needed. We were then given £1 pocket money for the journey. From Hanover, we took a special British official train to the Hook of Holland; we sat in a special 2nd Class compartment for German travellers. On our journey we were served food in the buffet car. An agent from the Mueller travel agency was waiting for us at Hook of Holland, and he took us to our ship. We slept the night on board and the following day, at midday, we arrived at Harwich (England). Here there was another customs check, where they hardly looked at our luggage, only our papers. […] Following another brief look at our papers, we were taken from Harwich to London, where the majority of my travel companions were already expected. […] The next day we were picked up again and each put on the correct train. These staff members all spoke reasonably understandable German. When we reached our destinations, we were welcomed by our employers.'[214]

The second important camp was the Lincoln Barracks in Minister. Until the end of September 1949, those travelling to the Hook of Holland under Westward Ho prepared for their journey here. As the British insisted on categorising Sudeten Germans as DPs rather than German citizens, for the sake of consistency DPs and the Sudeten Germans were accommodated together. According to a contemporary observer, the women here were 'heartily' cared for by 'a good German widow of an officer'.[215] The German Red Cross and Caritas were present, and the women were also allowed to go to church, or to the cinema, opera and the zoo. A nearby stadium offered sports activities, but the swimming pool and tennis courts were reserved for the use of British soldiers and their families.[216]

Mecklenbeck was perhaps the best known camp, and it operated as a transit camp from the beginning of September 1948 until the end of July 1950.[217] During this time, 127 group transports left for Britain.[218] The camp came under the jurisdiction of the Manpower Division of the Control Commission, but was managed by Margarete Fuhrmann, a member of staff at the Münster labour office. It consisted of three large huts in a horseshoe shape. On 3 September 1948 it became the subject of media attention. The first of the North Sea travelling contingents had arrived, some 100 women, who would continue their journey the following day via the Hook of Holland to Britain. The Minister of Employment for North Rhine-Westphalia, August Halbfell, wished them well and 'reminded the girls of their responsible duties as Germans in England, and asked them to reinforce the good impression left by our prisoners of war'.[219] Political speeches are often open to criticism, and here too it is debatable as to why these women, recruited by the British, should suddenly be expected to take on the role of ambassadors. Many were turning their backs on a country that offered them very little future, and in which many had suffered the harsh realities of refugee life. Apparently it was not enough to simply wish them luck and offer them the promise of an open door and a helping hand should they decide to return in the future.

A look at the occupational breakdown of this first group suggests that these women were carefully chosen to fulfil certain British expectations. There were nursery and hospital nurses, medical-technical assistants, office clerks, administrators, students and only a few domestics.[220] Most had been scarred by the war or the post-war period: When they were medically examined—the last chance to check for any contagious diseases or

pregnancies whilst still in continental Europe, and probably get an indication of who was still a virgin—the camp doctor bemoaned the 'general bad condition of the teeth'.[221]

Once more, the women had to negotiate a series of bureaucratic hurdles. They each received their travel papers, stamped with the relevant residency and work permits, in a 'cream coloured cardboard envelope'.[222] Their luggage was checked, and during the process they were told which region of England they would be going to. Different coloured luggage tags were used to show where they would be going. And finally, they were asked to write to Mecklenbeck to provide an account of their experiences. This gave rise to a remarkable collection of personal letters. Several of these were even translated for the British selection committees. It took a strong interest in order to optimise its efforts and be able to deal with any complaints about local living or working conditions: 'One letter reporting unhappy and difficult conditions does more harm to the continued success of recruitment in Germany, than any number of letters from happy and satisfied girls.'[223]

The daily routine at Mecklenbeck ran according to a set of strict rules.[224] Residents were woken at 7 a.m., and then called, room by room over the loud speaker, to morning ablutions. The rest of the day was also highly structured, right up until 'lights out' at 10:30 p.m. Unauthorised persons were forbidden to enter the camp. The police made sure that 'neither in the evening or during the night any unscrupulous elements approached or crept into the camp'.[225]

Despite the almost military discipline it appears that time passed quickly at Mecklenbeck. Presumably the communal activities were intended to distract from possible feelings of worry, uncertainty and anxiety that could arise in the somewhat stressful circumstances. Camp manager Margarete Fuhrmann reported on the daily routine in January 1949. 'Each contingent stays here for three days. […] The girls all arrive at different times, so that the first day is taken up with registering and allocating rooms. On the second day there is passport inspection and, following that, a brief medical examination. Then, on the same morning, a photographer comes and takes a picture of each of the girls. The photographs are developed before the girls leave, so that they can take the pictures with them to England. […] On the morning of the third day, the girls relax before their long journey. At 2 o'clock there is a brief customs check, at 3:30 a cup of coffee, and then at 4:30 the girls leave the camp and go to Mecklenbeck railway station. There, they board two specially prepared German wagons, that will be coupled to the German international train in Marienthal, Münster, which then takes them to the Hook of Holland.'[226]

For the majority this was their first trip abroad, and they prepared themselves for it as well as their circumstances would allow. Most owned a suitcase, but few had much to put in it—minimal toilet items, some underwear and perhaps a second dress. In many cases, the only belongings a woman had were the clothes she stood up in. Many intended to buy a complete new wardrobe once in Britain. Even so, a lot of the recruits felt it especially important to create a good impression by the way they looked, and managed to assemble rather attractive wardrobes for the time despite quite modest means. Hand stitched shoes, that could be swapped for ten packets of cigarettes, remained a rare treat that few could afford. However, zip-up coats made from dyed blankets were quite common. Sometimes there may have been a couple of dresses bought on the black market, a pullover, and if someone was really well supplied, a skirt made out of uniform trousers and dyed black:

'Now, I wore this apricot coloured pullover, with black stripes. It was long haired Angora, from France I believe, and over this I wore a black coat. You see, we looked good; actually we were all quite well dressed.'[227]

Many remembered the railway station at the Dutch border. Passports were stamped there, but more importantly, they were also given hot tea. The Hook of Holland crossing was also often remembered through logistical details. The ships that made the crossing to Harwich were sometimes comfortable and sometimes less so. Some women on military transport ships slept in hammocks or on cotton mats in the hold. Others spent the night in twin birth cabins on elegant passenger liners complete with cabin service. For those who had never been on a ship before it was a fantastic adventure, but for the seasick passengers the crossing was a necessary evil they were glad to forget. They often travelled in quite large groups with other recruited women or paying passengers. Sometimes such groups were segregated, to prevent tensions arising between DP's, Germans or Austrians, for example. As a letter written in 1949 indicates, it also appears that not all groups were treated entirely equally: 'Altogether, we were 200 Reich Germans and 23 Sudeten Germans. We always received preferential treatment.'[228] Another woman put it more bluntly: 'When we arrived in England, we noticed that we were being favoured, more than the Reich German and Austrian girls, who arrived with us. We soon realised that here we were DPs.'[229]

In Britain, the workforce recruited under Westward Ho and the North Sea scheme became the responsibility of reception camps, holding camps and hostels until they were placed with an employer. In the early phase of Westward Ho, the DPs were sent to reception camps near London and Hull, but later the West Wratting Camp near Cambridge, which also served as a holding camp, took over this function. There were further holding camps at Lochinver near Edinburgh, Full Sutton in Yorkshire, Inskip in Lancashire, Childs Ercall in Shropshire, Bedhampton in Hampshire, and Chandler's Ford near Southampton. Special hostels for family members were established in Hull, Alsager (Staffordshire) and West Wells (Wiltshire).[230] Whilst the ethnic Germans recruited under Westward Ho could be sent to any of the above mentioned camps, the Sudeten German women, recruited for the cotton industry, had to go either directly to Inskip, or arrived there after a brief stay at West Wratting. The women of the North Sea scheme, on the other hand, usually went to the Hyde Park Square Hostel in London, at least until December 1948. Later they were sent to West Wratting.[231]

Many of the women remember their arrival at Harwich as being more like the beginning of a short holiday or excursion rather than the start of new phase of working life. Everything was organised. The immigration formalities were dealt with quickly. This was followed by 'the most beautiful moment' of the whole journey: The receipt of the promised £1 pocket money.[232] Volunteers from charitable organisations then escorted the recruits to their camp or hostel. The journey usually continued directly to London or Cambridge by train. The degree of comfort surprised them. Third class carriages did not have wooden benches, as they did in Germany, and even on the relatively short ride to London, 'bread, cake and tea' was once again served.[233] For some it was more of an adventure to travel from Harwich to London by bus: 'And then the big double-deckers arrived, that were to take us to London. Well, some of them hadn't even seen a single-decker before, because they were from the countryside. There was great excitement, it caused a real stir. They were dying to ride upstairs on a double-decker. […] And then the

bright lights of London, again there was great excitement. Then in London, we were taken to a hostel in Hyde Park, that was not so special. We noticed on the first day, that most of the staff were Polish workers, that had arrived a long time before us. They wanted to explain to us how to use a lavatory and things like that.'[234]

It dawned on some women, during their journey or by the time they arrived in Britain at the very latest, that they were not the only ones to have been recruited. Depending on where they were staying or where they worked, they came across other foreigners daily. The experience was not always without tension. The experience of the migrant quoted above was echoed in a letter, written by another, in January 1949: 'When we arrived at the [Hyde Park] hostel, we were closer to crying than laughing. The welcome was awful, because Polish and Czech women work at this hostel, and these do not like us at all.'[235]

Kitted out with a ration book and the princely sum of £1 to spend, many found London to be the biggest event of their lives so far. They went sight-seeing and stared in amazement at shop windows full of goods. They strolled in the parks, gazed in awe at London's finer buildings, and were sorely tempted by nylon stockings and the range of food that was available. 'We went off to spend our £1. You could buy lots of stuff. I still remember, you could buy fruit on the street, for me that was like paradise. And then off to see Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace, etc.'[236] Cigarettes were also extremely popular: 'A three day stay in London was great, all the girls bought stockings and all sorts of stuff; the first thing I bought was 40 cigarettes.'[237]

For those who bypassed London, the first impressions of England were somewhat sobering: Reality did not match the high hopes and expectations: 'That was bleak, grey, gloomy', remembered Margarete. 'The weather was bad, well it was January, but there was no green, everything was dead. And we looked at each other, what have we done? What is awaiting us?'[238] The smoke from thousands of chimneys, the awful air pollution and the unaccustomed sight of sooty terraced housing in the industrial towns did not correspond with the traditional image of idyllic green countryside or imperial might. There were also huge differences in the comfort, location and appearance of a hostel in London on the one hand, and the Nissen huts of the former RAF camp at West Wratting, 13 miles outside Cambridge, on the other.[239]

Domestic service and working in the National Health Service (NHS)

Their time in holdings camps came to an end when the women were sent on to their allotted work places. The particular jobs they were given were supposed to correspond with their individual wishes, professional suitability and experience, and their language abilities. None of the migrants recruited under the North Sea scheme knew in advance who they would be working for or what they would be doing. Moreover, they had fewer choices in terms of work than the DPs. They were restricted to working in hospitals or nursing homes in jobs where no extra training was needed, for example in the kitchens, canteens, laundries or as cleaners or caring for patients in the wards. They could be sent to orphanages and children's homes, where there was a great demand for domestics. Or they could be employed in hardship households that housed farmers, doctors, clergymen, invalids or the elderly. Occasionally there were openings in factories, as long as the union concerned was willing to sanction employing German women. This was the case in

several sweet plants, in those making stockings and underwear, and in the Scottish textile industry.

Some women had decided which region they wanted to live in or the type of work they wanted to do. They were also clear about what they would rather not do, if at all possible, for example, working in a TB hospital.[240] Others did not want to work as domestics. After all they could have done this sort of work in Germany. And as well as having opinions on the nature and location of the job (there was greater demand for a job in London than there were opportunities available), some were also strongly influenced by their peers. While some did not mind where they went for the first two years, others would wait until they could be placed with their friends.

In the larger camps, new jobs would be announced over the loudspeaker. Those who were interested would report to the Placing Officer. In the smaller London hostels, the women would gather in the recreation room where somebody from the labour exchange would arrive to read out the vacancies. The women could decide there and then and put up their hand if they were interested. There was relative freedom of choice, as long as there were more vacancies than applicants.

Then came the last stage of the process. Suitcases had to be packed again, and for some this took a little longer than when they left Germany. Coats and luggage were labelled with names and destinations, and the recruits were accompanied by volunteers from British charities to the bus or train station. Larger groups were escorted all the way to their destination. There they would be met, either by their employer or another set of volunteers, and taken to their workplaces and accommodation. The routine of working life was about to begin again, and with it came the realisation that the Britain that existed beyond London bore little resemblance to the traditional image presented abroad. ‘We took a train, from Kings Cross station I believe, to Nottingham. I still clearly remember the awful junk and mountains of rubbish. It was terrible. I will never forget it, it was horrible.’[241] Hard work awaited the women, especially those going to a hardship household. Like all migrants recruited by the government, they were tied to their employer and could not change jobs without the permission of the labour office. In this respect they were very restricted in comparison to those who had travelled to Britain on individual work permits. Although the latter were also obliged to remain with the same employer for at least 12 months, a study carried out in London and the South East by the Ministry of Labour in 1951 found that 13 per cent of newly employed foreign domestics changed jobs within the first three months, and that 30 per cent did so within their first year of employment. An above average number of these were Germans.[242]

The numerous letters sent to German labour offices and the Mecklenbeck camp between September 1948 and November 1949 vividly record the living and working conditions these women experienced. We were not able to establish how many of these letters were written as it appears a number were subsequently destroyed, probably along with other apparently ‘unimportant’ files. Only about 50 letters still remain at the Public Records Office, some in German and some translated into English.[243] The general tone of the early letters is positive, even enthusiastic in some cases, but from about mid-1949 there is an increasing number of complaints. This may be because it was only letters of complaint that were deemed worthy of keeping. Or it could indicate that the women who decided early on to go to Britain had far fewer illusions about their future and were more dissatisfied with the situation in Germany than those who travelled later on. The latter

may even, perhaps, have acted on positive reports coming from Britain, and thus had higher expectations.

The same trend appears in the letters written by women working on farms. There are 17 of these, of which 9 are generally contented in tone and 8 contain complaints. With two exceptions the positive letters were all written in 1948. The letter from Sylvia S., however, illustrates the extent to which individual attitudes to life influenced personal appreciations. She was sent to Wales, where the farmhouse had yet to see the comforts of electric lighting or a cooker: 'I have ended up on a farm, and a really nice one at that. In the mornings and evenings I go into the cow shed, armed with a bucket for the milk. On the second day that I was here, the farmer's wife went into hospital and gave birth to her second child. I took care of the household alone. Cooking on an open fire was really fun. The food is good. Every day there is pudding and always white bread and cakes. I would give a whole week's wages just for some good Westphalian Schwarzbrot. The population is very friendly. I am invited to all manner of events. Our farm is on a mountain and has a view down onto the sea. It only takes half an hour to get down to the beach. I had better finish now, as my candle is wilting.'[244] Hanna S. also felt happy on the farm she had been posted to in Leicestershire. This was in part due to the various invitations for outings she received from villagers, a co-worker who was a former German POW, and the further seven ex-POWs who lived in the village and with whom she could go to the pub, cinema or church. Furthermore, her employer had sent a generous parcel of food to her parents in Germany.[245]

Those who were not happy on farms complained about the hard work, long hours, little leisure time, poor relationships with their employers, loneliness and the inability to communicate. 'I am so totally alone here on the farm, and I hardly speak any English. If only I could find another German girl', wrote Else B.[246] Sisters Luise and Helga S. were fortunate enough to be posted together and were surrounded by friendly people. But despite this: 'We are so homesick, please help us. […] Everyone is very kind to us, but we can't bear it.'[247] Many who wanted to leave farms did not necessarily wish to return to Germany. Instead they preferred work in a British hospital where the wages were better and there were often dozens of other German women working.[248] It is possible that an awareness of the better conditions in towns and cities reinforced the sense of dissatisfaction felt by some of the farm workers.

A similar picture is revealed in the letters written by five women who worked in hardship households. Elisabeth D., who was the housekeeper for two elderly people during 1948, was one of those who enjoyed her work.[249] Gerda M., on the other hand, was not at all satisfied with the hard work she had to do, or with the vicar's wife who proved impossible to please.[250] Brigitte F. who, together with a friend, worked in a household in Aberdeen, also complained bitterly about the work and the thinness of the bedding: 'After working here for 14 days we both are almost despairing. We start work at 6:45 in the morning and finish about 8:00 at night and often later. On New Year's Eve we had to iron until 10:30 p.m. That is not unusual. On Christmas Eve and on the following two holidays we had not one minute free and it will be the same thing on New Year's Day.'[251]

It must be assumed that at least some of these complaints would have been investigated by the local labour exchanges. In the above case, records have been kept of the report made by a welfare officer from the Aberdeen labour exchange who interviewed

all parties concerned.[252] In his report, he confirmed the long working hours but also added: 'They admit they are not hard pushed, but find they are never finished.' The employer conceded that her domestics did work unusually long hours, but blamed it on the way they worked. 'She was surprised when the girls told her that they were rising at 6:45 am as breakfast is at 8:00 am and all that is asked of them by that time is that the house table-maid should dust the two consulting rooms, which had taken her 20 minutes and lay the breakfast table and that the cook general should clean the front steps and door step (four or five altogether) and prepare the breakfast, for which there is usually no cooking'. The report then continued to give a full range of examples of what the employer considered to be the girls' time-consuming disorganisation.

Irrespective of whether the complaints were justified or not, this case highlights cultural differences that were the cause of many a young woman's dissatisfaction. Based on experience, English employers expected certain tasks to be achieved within a certain time. For them, their relationship with their domestic staff was purely professional and governed by a detailed contract. Many of the recruits, however, had no prior experience of this kind of work or the skills required. Also, in Britain it was usual practice to individually agree all the details of the employer-employee relationship at the start of employment. This was totally foreign to many German workers. Furthermore, culturally they were more likely to accept what an employer said than ask for changes on the basis of formal regulations set out in a negotiated and detailed contract. The ignorance of one was coupled with the unwillingness of the other, who refrained from acting 'because they think they will offend their employer, with their apparent lack of faith'.[253]

Women who were unaware of their rights and responsibilities continually found themselves with new tasks that they simply assumed belonged to their area of duties. 'In the household, there is often an inability to negotiate a correct agreement with the house wife, due to language difficulties. And in England a lot of things are based upon freely negotiated agreements', warned the German National Federation of Catholic Associations for the Protection of Young Women in 1950. 'The Ministry of Labour has, therefore, introduced a minimum wage. […] But free time, holidays and church service visits are all issues that require individually negotiated agreements—social attitudes in England are certainly based upon a positive sense of "fairness", but on the other hand it is expected that everyone protects their own rights.'[254]

Not every British employer operated within scrupulously negotiated contracts and not every domestic was simply imagining that her hours were too long or too hard. There were real instances of exploitation and unreasonable working conditions, and not all migrants were able to protect themselves or get redress by complaining. If they did not know it when they started, the German women, along with other foreign domestics, quickly realised that they missed out on the better jobs by a long way. This was due to the intrinsic logic of the system that gave locals priority. This meant that foreigners could only be employed in jobs where no British candidate could be found to fill the vacancy. Therefore posts offering the best pay and conditions were already taken by British workers, or foreigners who had been in Britain for longer.

Further problems in the area of interpersonal relations within households stemmed from false expectations some recruits held about their specific role. A number of women saw themselves as au pairs rather than a mere domestic. They expected to work, but also hoped to take on the role of mother's helper. Several managed to achieve this, but others

were forced to recognise that becoming a part of the family was not part of their contract and they remained ‘bound to the kitchen and their room’.[255] In 1951, Gerhard Stratenwerth of the German Ecclesiastical Foreign Department, noted with due irony: ‘It was lovely, for instance, when the young Countess X. explained how she would immediately disappear into the kitchen, with the children, the moment the family had a visitor. For here she is no longer a countess, nothing but a serving girl, who is socially completely unacceptable. The daughter of a university professor did become part of the family sphere, but she is far from convinced that she was in a better position than the Countess, because she is not allowed to utter a word at the table. She must listen to the conversation, but keep her own opinions to herself. Having twice had the pleasure of observing the speechless amazement caused by her having made a remark, she has now decided, on compassionate grounds, to spare her English employers any such further excitement.’[256]

Another peculiarity was that even as early as the immediate post-war years, German domestics were posted to work in Jewish households. Marion Berghahn has already written about this in her study on *Continental Britons.* Some Jewish families refused point blank to employ a German domestic, whilst others did employ Germans but hid from them the fact that they were a Jewish family. A third group had no reservations and embraced the opportunity for their children ‘to pick up some German’.[257] Amongst the writers of the above mentioned letters, there was one who complained bitterly about the demands of a household that included four children and a heavily pregnant housewife.[258] In contrast, another wrote of being treated like a daughter and found her employer ‘awfully nice’.[259] One of our interviewee, worked for an elderly Jewish couple. She was a Sudeten German who, following her expulsion from the Sudetenland, met and fell in love with a young survivor of the Shoah. He then moved to London, and with the help of the necessary labour permit, managed to bring her over to join him.[260] Finally, a former Catholic church assistant who was active in north-west England from 1960 to 1962 reported the ‘very many German girls’ placed in Jewish households. These were usually well-to-do Jewish families, who had been based in England for a long time and who spoke English at home. They valued the talents of their German au pairs highly.[261]

The feelings and attitudes of German migrants who worked as domestics in British households are characterised by a certain ambivalence and are difficult to generalise about. Usually a lot was expected during long working hours, there was little time off and few holidays. At first glance the wages appear low in comparison to other employment opportunities, about £1.5–2 per week (including free board and lodging). Language difficulties and unfulfilled expectations, loneliness and homesickness were also significant problems. The living and working conditions, although on the surface very similar, were often perceived very differently. Most interviewees did not have much to say when talking about their work, which is hardly surprising given the daily monotony and apparent simplicity of their domestic activities.

The work carried out by women working as ward assistants or kitchen or cleaning staff in hospitals, TB clinics and psychiatric institutions was not much less physically demanding than farm work. These jobs were also difficult to fill with local labour or the foreign workforce already resident in Britain. Despite this, almost all who worked in these institutions were satisfied with their choice. This is recorded not only in the

surviving letters, sent to Mecklenbeck in 1948/49, in which 15 of the 16 letter writers express positive views,[262] but also in the interviews that took place half a century later.

Keeping the health system equipped with staff remained the responsibility of the government in the post-war period, just as it had during the war when nurses and staff from the West Indies and doctors from all parts of the Commonwealth had been recruited.[263] Despite the reasonable status that nursing enjoyed and the high reputation it had earned in the eyes of the public during the war, all disciplines were short of staff. In 1949, the Ministry of Labour launched an extensive campaign called ‘Staffing the Hospitals’.[264] According to the ministry, the lack of interest shown by British women was not only because the wages were low. They were also put off by the long working hours, the amount of overtime, the lack of free time (and its effect on socialising, friendships and family life), the standard of board and lodging and finally, the strict hospital discipline. The ministry admitted that in *some* instances these criticisms were valid, but insisted that it was wrong to generalise.[265] This appears to have been a rather too optimistic view, as the findings of an official report into TB clinics and hospitals, undertaken by the ministry itself and published soon afterwards, was to show. The report found that most of the establishments were incredibly labour-intensive to run. Some had good accommodation for nurses, but generally the living quarters for staff fell below expected standards. It also recorded that staff shortages led to long working hours, and the work itself was strenuous and uninteresting.[266]

Recruiting foreigners who, due to their own dire circumstances were less choosy than the local workforce, offered the health service a short-term solution at least. It was in this context that huge numbers of Irish women were employed, and that Baltic DPs were recruited under the Balt Cygnet scheme. The latter soon developed into the Westward Ho scheme, which recruited DPs for other sections of the economy. In addition there were the German women recruited under the North Sea scheme which was followed almost immediately by the widespread recruitment of labour from colonies and the Commonwealth. The fact that often several—sometimes dozens—of migrant workers of the same nationality were employed at the same establishment, made working in the health service far more attractive for many of the recruits than working as a domestic in a household.[267] They did not feel so isolated and the other women’s company helped ease homesickness. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour’s welfare officers, volunteers from British charities and other local clubs and churches could keep in contact with them more easily than they could with the domestics scattered throughout the country.

Letters and our interviews revealed a generally positive response to initial meetings with superiors and colleagues. These were sometimes marked by a rather distant friendliness, and some women even felt as if they were being observed with ‘suspicion’.[268] Most have vivid memories of arriving at their new places of work. They were thrilled by the fireplaces, stoves and heating, the washing facilities, showers and baths, and especially by the continuous supply of hot water. They were also overjoyed to have their own room, something they had so painfully missed at home, and by the fact that they did not even have to clean their rooms themselves. The contrast with their experiences in Germany could not have been greater. A single room, even in a wooden extension, was ‘fantastic’ because you did not have to share it with anyone.[269]

Tempering the joy of comfortable accommodation, however, was initial uneasiness for those who found themselves working in psychiatric hospitals. A few women were so

shocked they wanted to return home immediately.[270] Some of those sent to work at TB hospitals had similar reactions, and the tests they underwent to check their immune systems and suitability for the jobs only increased their anxiety: 'Tuberculosis was a greatly feared disease in England at the time. People even told us, later on, that this hospital was known as "The Last Place". Whoever was sent to that hospital never came out again, and that included the staff. Oh well, that's what we found out later. […] Before we were allowed on to the wards we were given injections in the forearm to find out if our bodies could resist tuberculosis. My injection flared up the very next day, and my arm became heavy and stiff, which meant I was sent straight onto the wards. […] Others, whose arms did not flare up, were then employed as dining room or kitchen maids, or they became waitresses in the doctor's restaurants or the nurses dining rooms.'[271]

Most of the German migrants had little nursing experience and were taught on the wards. Experienced nurses explained the most important procedures, step by step. They worked a 48-hour week over six days, and their duties included cleaning the ward, helping wash patients, serving meals and taking temperatures. Many did not have to clean their own rooms but did have to clean the ward. Changing bedding and polishing floors to keep them gleaming was hard work,[272] but it was not as unpleasant as having to empty the cuspidors or spittoons.[273] As time went by the women were given more responsible tasks such as distributing medication and writing up patient reports, which in turn raised their status and self-confidence.

On the other side, some who worked on TB wards felt that outside work they were being stigmatised. If they were at a dance and happened to mention where they worked, for example, dance partners would not be so numerous, and men that they might already have been out with would fail to turn up for their next date.[274] The feeling that away from hospital one was viewed as an outcast may have been an added psychological burden, although none of our interviewees showed any clear sign of this.

Overall the German nurses found working with patients a positive experience. Many showed his or her gratitude by giving them chocolate or cigarettes, although strictly speaking accepting gifts was prohibited. Sometimes close relationships were formed, especially with children on the ward. The patients' reactions often reinforced the women's conviction that they were doing a meaningful job, and this contributed to a very positive self-image. It also appears that in certain respects the German nurses were different. This was expressed in statements such as 'we were gentler and more understanding', or 'they simply loved us'. But there were also patients 'that did not wish to be looked after by a German'.[275]

Generally the German workers had few difficulties with patients, but irrespective of national stereotypes, they often had problems with the extremely strict hospital discipline: 'What made me unhappy were the hospital superiors. They drove me mad, the discipline was so severe.'[276] Hospitals operated according to stringent regulations. The matron stood at the top of the nursing structure. She commanded a rigid, hierarchically organised staff and thus had a decisive influence over the atmosphere of a hospital. Some held anti-German views,[277] while others proved extremely popular. With few exceptions, a sense of fair play governed working relationships. Anti-German remarks were promptly punished, as one Jewish staff member found out for himself when he referred to his colleague as a 'German barbarian'. He was immediately moved to another hospital, whilst the recipient received all manner of support.[278]

Some of those interviewed emphasised that working conditions in the hospitals were very different to what they had been used to. These comments usually came from women who, because they had come from higher up the social ladder in Germany or were relatively experienced or well educated, felt disadvantaged in Britain. They recalled the strict hierarchical order of the staff on the wards in particular, the different dining rooms for doctors, nurses and general personnel, and the fact that these social divisions were carried through even outside the workplace. Migrants coming from an urban environment often compared Britain to Germany unfavourably: 'During this period the hospitals in England were very, very poor. There was a big room with 25 patients perhaps. It was cold in the winter. The wind blew and then dust fell down (soot from the chimney) and smoke came out, and the people had to fight for air.'[279] Some found several other characteristics strange and antiquated, such as the bed making: 'Those sheets and blankets, one, two, three sometimes even four blankets on top of each other, and each one had to be put on one at a time.'[280] Aspects of the uniform also caused indignation: 'Whoever went onto the wards received a green house coat and then we were given little bonnets, which were like something from the middle ages. They were drawn together with an elastic band and they were so frilly. And we thought: Well, they are pretty backward here. We couldn't say it out loud, but we thought it; that can't be right, so old fashioned. […] But after a few weeks we did complain a bit about our silly hats. And then we were given proper bonnets, we had achieved what we wanted.'[281]

The nurses' and student nurses' uniforms were far from antiquated. On the contrary, they were highly professional and were featured in the official, bi-lingual brochure *Scheme for Training German Girls as State Registered Nurses in Great Britain* to boost recruitment.[282] They were regarded as a special group within the North Sea scheme. Between August 1948 and May 1950, 766 student nurses came to Britain to be trained, 58 fully qualified nurses and 798 nursing orderlies were also recruited at the same time.[283] In addition, many of the women arriving in Britain with qualifications were able to swap their job for a position as a trainee nurse. There was a huge demand for nurses. In the late 1940s, approximately 22,000 women enrolled annually on the 3–4-year courses to train as a nurse, less than half of them managed to successfully complete their training.[284] Potential candidates from Germany had to satisfy some quite tough criteria to even be considered to train as nurses in Britain. They had to be between 18 and 25 years old, have a 'good education', and in addition have reasonable oral and written English. They had to be fit and healthy and willing to commit themselves to stay for the duration of the course.[285] German labour offices were involved in the selection process. They organised a series of medical check-ups and written tests, which many failed. In December 1948, for example, 120 applicants were invited to interviews for a total of just 30 vacancies.[286]

The first group of 50 German student nurses arrived in Britain on 15 August 1948. The Ministry of Labour viewed this as something of an experiment to see how the media and the public would react to allowing Germans to work in this sensitive area.[287] The women enjoyed special treatment, noticeably better than what was usual for the North Sea scheme. Instead of being sent straight to one of the four training hospitals that had been specially selected for them, they (and several other groups following them) were sent to the state-run Nursing Reception Centre at Colwyn Bay on the Welsh coast for

three weeks. There, they received English language tuition and were also given information about the country and their future profession.[288]

In common with other trainees, the German student nurses were constantly observed by their teachers and matrons, as well as by the British Red Cross, which received lists of names and the hospitals they were training in.[289] But despite this special treatment, the training was demanding and not all got through it: ‘You went to the training school for three months, where you learned practical things, such as how to deal with patients, but little theory. Things like how to make beds. Then you were sent to your first ward, where you naturally felt very stupid; but it was the same for everyone. Some of the nurses were nice […] others not so nice. But generally I had no complaints there. But of course the work was dreadfully hard, because of the incredible shortage of staff. Then we were immediately put on night duty; within the first six months, I think. […] That was very, very difficult. Work five nights and then two nights off. […] Then when we had finished a night shift, for example, instead of going to bed, we had to go to the classroom for a two-hour lesson. […] We were the first two Germans. My colleague was very unhappy. She was in the room next to mine, and one morning I went in because it was so quiet. I found a note lying on her bed, it said: Dear Monika when you read this, I will be dead. She had gone away to commit suicide. She had a very strict father and she did not dare go home and tell him: I can’t do this, it is too hard for me. She was very homesick. She was a very sensitive girl. But she survived, thank God.’[290]

The Ministry of Labour was very keen to see the experiment succeed, and in its records the German student nurses are praised in the highest terms. A report from the Old Church County Hospital in Romford, where 15 women from the first group started their training in November 1948, noted that ‘these students were intelligent, keenly interested in nursing, most industrious and conscientious’. It continued in these positive terms: ‘In theory and practical work they attained a good standard by constant study and practice, the initial difficulties of language and foreign environment being largely overcome by the end of the term. In manners they are most polite, and in appearance neat and clean. On their entry into the school they appeared to be somewhat apprehensive of their reception by the other students, but they mixed well and no antagonism was noted. They appear to be happy on the wards and are taking part in the activities of the Nurses’ Social League.’[291]

On the back of these glowing assessments more and more hospitals began to show an interest in German student nurses. Exactly how many successfully completed their nursing training is unclear, and not all of the newly qualified nurses chose to remain in Britain. At the end of 1952, for example, 6 of the 10 student nurses from the first group who were sent to the Joyce Green Hospital in Dartford had successfully qualified. One of these married an Englishman and stayed where she was, two had already emigrated to Canada (probably with their husbands), and another intended to emigrate there as soon as she had completed her additional training as a midwife. The remaining two had gone back to Germany for several months.[292]

Leisure time, partners and problems

In contrast to working on a remote farm, hospital work offered greater opportunities to make friends and acquaintances. It was also easier to meet future husbands in urban areas

than in the sparsely populated countryside. The particularly cosmopolitan nature of the hospitals also resulted in some of the North Sea women following boyfriends, fiancés or husbands to their homes in Canada, Australia, South Africa or some other part of the far-flung Commonwealth. Unfortunately, there are no statistics for the number of post-war migrants that married in Britain, but interviews undertaken as part of this study do give some interesting indications. Of the ten women from the North Sea scheme interviewed, eight married a British citizen. This includes all six of the women employed in the NHS, and the two women employed as domestics (one in a home in Blackpool and the other in a hardship household in Scotland). The remaining two were employed in the textile industry. Whilst a relatively high number of North Sea recruits that we interviewed married a British citizen, only one of the women who came to Britain on an individual labour permit did so. Of the remainder, one married a Pole, one a German and two Ukrainian. Despite the small size of these samples, they indicate a trend that can be explained by the greater opportunity to make contact with British men, both inside and outside the hospital and in other state institutions. It may also reflect a sense of social status and greater self-confidence as a result of their work that allowed the migrants to communicate and participate in a British environment with greater ease.

Women employed at hospitals also had more interesting things to do in their leisure time and greater opportunities to mix with other Germans than those working on farms. Sometimes they spent their free evenings together, not in the recreation rooms provided but in someone's single room (although strictly speaking this was usually not allowed). This companionship helped when there was a crisis or home seemed particularly far away: 'If someone was a bit sad, or things weren't going right or if they were homesick, we would all sit down together and help each other out. Keep going, two years is not an eternity!'[293] In addition to this, memories of emotionally charged evenings prior to Christmas remain particularly strong. On these evenings songs were sung and traditions from home were played out.

We heard many positive descriptions of work and life generally expressed by women recruited for the NHS. Work was viewed particularly positively when the migrant concerned had been given a certain amount of responsibility and recognition for what she was doing, be that in wards with patients or preparing meals in the kitchens. For those whose roles included nursing duties, and for those who became fully qualified nurses, the perceptions of the job were even more positive. This must also have been connected to their improved social status. All in all, these women enjoyed personal and financial freedom, and their life and work generally within the community. Often this period was also important in terms of life history, because it constituted a phase of independence and self-reliance prior to marriage. Most of the North Sea recruits interviewed got married between 2 and 5 years after their arrival, which was a lot later than many of the Sudeten Germans employed in the cotton industry. With marriage, not only did the nurses give up their personal and financial independence, in many cases they also gave up contact with other Germans, and sometimes felt isolated as a result.

In contrast to this, a very substantial number of the domestics working in the countryside suffered from strong feelings of homesickness and isolation, not to mention boredom, during their leisure time.[294] This was particularly true when they first arrived, and often resulted in frustration and a desire to return home, or to swap either their job or location. Contemporary British and German reports both warned of the dire consequences

of this lack of contact with other people that was usually caused by the language barrier. The reports spoke of 'emotional burdens' and their effects, which in the worst cases resulted in suicide.[295] In many cases the employer remained totally unaware of the situation, even those who took an interest. Many were concerned for their employees, with some even going as far as vetting potential English boyfriends.[296] Others tried to prevent the young women from going out, or they worried 'that they would form unwelcome friendships, at the local dance'.[297] The real fear behind such comments was that they would form relationships with men who were not white. Such relationships could happen fairly easily at the international clubs found in most of the larger towns where foreigners could meet and socialise. Unwanted pregnancies often occurred. For the woman the consequences could be terrifying, and even more so if the baby's father was not British as she faced the threat of deportation.[298] The official deportation papers would read: 'Medically Unfit—Pregnant.'[299] For many, the fear of returning home to Germany was worse than having a backstreet abortion.

Sudeten Germans

Due to the strength of the unions, the barriers to German women working in the textile industry were higher and more widespread than those in any other industry. Firms in Scotland and the Midlands accepted German women from the North Sea scheme as well as ethnic German workers recruited under Westward Ho. In contrast, the wool industry in Yorkshire accepted ethnic Germans only, whereas the cotton mills of Lancashire employed both ethnic Germans and Sudeten Germans. Detailed information on these migrants is, unfortunately, hard to come by. Official statistics record 1,304 Germans from the Sudetenland working in Lancashire, but there are no figures for the number of ethnic Germans employed in the textile industry. The only figure available is the total number of European Volunteer Workers: 8,647 in the cotton industry (of which 7,546 were female) and 4,286 in the wool industry (3,173 female).[300] The uneven distribution of the workforce between the two industries—nearly twice as many EVWs in the cotton industry compared to the woollen industry—shows how important the cotton industry was for exports and to rebuilding the country after the war.

Any retrospective assessment must take into account the fact that the post-war boom in Britain's cotton industry was but a temporary phase in its long-term decline. The euphoria of the late 1940s was followed in 1952 by the first of many crises that forcibly reduced the workforce. This decline was clearly already under way in the years following the depression of the early 1930s. In 1945, the cotton industry employed 189,000 people. This was half the figure for 1937, and roughly a third of the figure for 1924.[301] Production had also been halved by 1945, and 13 million spindles and an estimated 150,000–200,000 looms stood idle in mills that had ceased production and closed.[302] The short-term rise in demand and weakened competition from Asia and Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s prompted the re-opening of mills and a demand for labour that was almost insatiable. Cotton exports brought hard currency into the country. This benefited the population and economic reconstruction generally, although the proposition that each new worker brought the country the equivalent of £1,000 in US dollars can hardly have been accurate,[303] and the slogan 'Britain's bread hangs by Lancashire's

thread' wishful thinking rather than a true reflection of the value of the cotton industry to the economy.[304]

Thanks to the sobering findings of two official committees that reported in 1944 and 1945 respectively,[305] in the immediate post-war years companies and trade unions were well aware that their industry was far from healthy. According to these enquiries, less than half the capacity of British spinning mills used the ring spinning process (which spun and wound thread onto spools at the same time), and the majority of thread was made using the older, more difficult to learn, mule spinning technique that involved dividing the production process up. In contrast, ring spinning produced 99 per cent of the thread made in the USA. Furthermore, it was produced using a high-speed system uncommon in Britain. Thread produced in this way was stronger and therefore more suitable for automatic looms that made up 95 per cent of looms used in the USA. In Britain on the other hand, 95 per cent of the looms were older Lancashire looms using technology that essentially had not changed for almost a hundred years. British firms were also disadvantaged by working a 48 hour week on a one shift per day basis, whereas American looms operated 139 hours per week on three shifts per day. British industry also suffered from deficiencies in organisation, standards (concerning the age of buildings and machinery) and in the size of some firms. At this time, the British cotton industry was structured around an enormous number of small firms and businesses.[306] All this meant that the competitiveness of the British cotton industry was, to a great extent, dependant upon reduced foreign competition due to the war. By 1951, world-wide exports had reached 89 per cent of pre-war levels. In spite of the tremendous efforts made in the preceding years, now the British share had fallen from 27 to 15 per cent.[307] The unwillingness of some mill owners to invest in new technology, combined with strong trade union traditionalism, led to missed opportunities.

The strength of the trade unions can be seen in two areas in particular. First, in 1946 they managed to reduce the working week from 48 to 45 hours. This meant factories were closed for the entire weekend, which in turn pushed up production costs. Attempts to compensate by introducing evening shifts for housewives and increasing overtime—measures that were initially vehemently resisted by local trade unions—could not cover the deficit.[308] Second, via their union representatives, male mule spinners used their status to make the employment of newly recruited foreign (female) ring spinners conditional on guarantees that their own jobs would not be threatened.[309] This greatly delayed the introduction of modern production techniques. Although the number of mule spindles fell between 1945 and 1951 from 23.1 to 17.7 million respectively, the number of ring spindles operating during this period remained constant, at 10.5 million.[310] As well as national or ethnic origins, gender also played a major role in who did what in many parts of the cotton industry. This further hampered modernisation because fully automated looms could only use thread produced by ring spinning.

Recruiting foreign workers for Britain's cotton industry was not even considered immediately after the war. Nor was it seen as an option in January 1946, when a Board of Trade committee estimated that the cotton industry would require a further 255,000 workers to bring it up to its full capacity. It proved extremely difficult to fill even the most urgent vacancies with local workers, as many of these had found work in other sectors during the war or moved away from the cotton towns permanently.[311] Extensive advertising during 1948 eased the problem but did not solve it.[312] These campaigns

targeted women in Lancashire in particular, and a whole range of incentives were offered. They included wage increases, part-time work and evening shifts, child care for children of all ages (even during school holidays), providing canteens and laundries, recreation rooms, lockers and first aid stations, improving the sanitary facilities, introducing welfare officers, and laying on cultural and sporting activities, excursions and holidays. In several towns businesses were persuaded to come to the mills and take orders from women at their workplace. Goods ordered were then delivered directly to the worker's home. Although many factory owners were aware of the urgent need for reform within their factories, others had to be persuaded, sometimes quite forcibly, by representatives of the government or Cotton Board.[313]

Despite all this effort the increase in the workforce was relatively modest. By the end of 1948 the campaign had managed to recruit 20,000 new local workers. There were huge variations in recruitment rates, but in the spinning mills alone 1,000 new workers were being hired every week. A similar campaign targeting the woollen regions of Yorkshire in mid 1948 produced similar results. After 16 months the female workforce had increased to only 7,300.[314] This made both branches of the textile industry reliant upon workers from abroad. Because it generated more export income (and was thus more vulnerable to market fluctuations) the government considered the cotton industry a higher priority than the wool industry, which largely sold to the domestic market.

Inskip and Full Sutton

The majority of European workers, regardless of whether they were recruited for the woollen industry or the cotton industry, spent several days or even weeks at either Full Sutton or Inskip holding camps. The former RAF camp Full Sutton could be reached quite quickly from Hull, which was one of the ports of entry.[315] Those who stayed in the camp for any length of time could visit the nearby town of York, where visiting the local tourist sites came a distant second to trying to satisfy their 'endless hunger' with un-rationed foodstuffs.[316] Later, when the Inskip camp near Preston in Lancashire took over part of Full Sutton's function, the camp was temporarily used to house over 700 sick, disabled, unsuitable or unemployed EVWs.[317]

By 1950, over 11,000 EVWs had passed through the former Royal Navy Air Station at Inskip.[318] The recollections of migrants who stayed there vary enormously. In a letter dated August 1949, two sisters wrote positively about the experience. Having been met at Preston railway station and taken to the camp by bus, they described a camp consisting of 40 'beautiful and clean' Nissen huts, where they 'simply enjoyed some lovely days' with evening dances and party games.[319] This was in stark contrast to the recollections of two Sudeten Germans who had stayed at Inskip in October and January respectively. Their main complaint was the temperature of the large rooms, which were inadequately heated by small stoves. Up to 30 women slept in each Nissen hut, and during the night someone would constantly have to get up to stop the fire going out. Conditions seemed primitive, and the food, which according to these interviewees was prepared by sour Polish camp personnel, was bad.[320] The terrible winter weather must also have dampened spirits, and it is not surprising that 'bleak, grey and dead' were adjectives used to describe the atmosphere.[321]

How long a woman stayed at a holding camp depended on the actual demand for labour in the mills. For those who wanted to stay together (a wish that was generally respected), it usually took more time for an appropriate offer to be received. There was no uniform system of placement. Some employers telephoned their requirements through to the camps, others picked employees out for themselves or sent staff from their personnel departments to do it for them. Methods of transport to workplaces also varied. Some companies made special arrangements with local taxi companies.[322] For others it was more economical to drive to the camps in trucks.[323] Several women made the final stage of their journey in buses that had been hired, either by the employer or the local labour exchange. Others took public transport.[324] The sense of responsibility for the recruits that had begun in Germany continued in Britain to the very last stage of the process, and only rarely did a woman leaving a camp have to make the last leg of her journey alone. For example, some women from Inskip reported making the journey from the camp to the labour exchange in Oldham by car. Here a female employee from the mill would meet her new colleagues and take them to the canteen for a meal. A tour of the factory would follow before she took them to their hostel.[325]

First impressions of the new workplace were not always particularly positive. The migrants entered a world that for many was totally foreign, and how they felt was greatly influenced by the time of year and the weather conditions. If it was cold and damp, the smoke belching out of thousands of chimneys would hang in the atmosphere and there would be little sunlight, even in the middle of the day. Open coal fires were also common, and the smoke from these not only smelt bad but clogged the mouth and throat. In a matter of hours, clothes would be covered in soot, and buses would have to attach lanterns for visibility or simply stop running.[326] Those who found themselves outdoors during such weather often decided not to return home, preferring instead to stay the night at the mill or with colleagues. Rain, fog and smoke combined gave everything a 'black and dirty' look.[327] Those who arrived during the warmer months had very different first impressions. For example Lilly, a Sudeten German, wrote home in 1949: 'England is also very beautiful and clean, the houses are the same size and there are opportunities to bath all over the place. There is also lots of work and living conditions are better than in Germany. The weather is always lovely but unfortunately there is no fog. The food is much better than in Germany.'[328]

At work

For the majority of women, the daily routine of working life began two days after leaving the holding camp. Many of them received training on the job, as was the norm in British factories at that time, but those who went to work in weaving or ring spinning factories underwent three months training.[329] Larger firms ran their own training departments, and there were also the official training centres created by the Ministry of Labour. Belgrave Mill in Oldham, which could take upto 500 trainees a year, was converted for just this purpose in the summer of 1945.[330] In 1948, the ex-POW camp Glen Mill (Oldham) underwent the same conversion. When completed it consisted of the training centre situated east of the town centre in the old mill, and the Glen Mill Hostel, which stood at the other end of town. In October 1950, due to a significant fall in the number of newly arriving foreign workers, this hostel also took over from Inskip as a holding camp for

newly arrived recruits. It became the only establishment of this type in Britain until it closed down in September 1952.[331]

Glen Mill Hostel consisted of several large Nissen huts, and was a great disappointment to all those who were anticipating greater personal privacy at the end of their long journey via Mecklenbeck and Inskip.[332] Each hut housed some 60 women, who each had a bed, a locker and a small bedside cupboard. The rooms were divided in half by the lockers. Washing facilities, washing machines, places to dry laundry, kitchens and dining rooms were all provided in separate huts. Breakfast was eaten in the hostel, and from Monday to Friday the evening meal was also provided there. The trainees took lunch in the mill canteen. At weekends the migrants had to cater for themselves. They cooked in their living quarters, or soon became regular customers at the fish and chip shops of Oldham.[333]

The day started with a walk or bus ride to the training centre. Dressed in green overalls 'with two buttons at the top and a waistband around the middle', and a head scarf 'to protect the hair', they crowded in groups of 12 around their English trainer, who would explain production processes and how to operate the machinery: 'Everything in English, and those that understood a bit of English had to translate for all the others.' Spinning demanded great dexterity, concentration and speed; if the moving spindles were not handled correctly fingers could easily be burned.[334] The training provided the necessary skills under largely realistic conditions. These included a high level of humidity, that if necessary was maintained with the help of humidifiers. Thus, as the day wore on conditions became increasingly warm and moist. The various machines produced huge amounts of dust, and with fine cotton particles swirling through the air, at times it could feel like working in a snowstorm.[335] Practical training alternated with classroom lessons, and at the end of the three-month course there were exams. These included general knowledge questions such as how many shillings make up half a crown? Soon they became so well known that for many who arrived later the exam 'was fun' and 'a little bit of cheating went on'.[336] The training programme was generally viewed positively, as it gave the opportunity to learn work methods in a step-by-step way, while at the same time learning other skills and improving their English.[337] From Monday to Friday the recruits were at the training centre, but they still had enough time to earn a little extra money, working a couple of hours in a cafe for example.[338] Figures given for wages during the training period and the cost of accommodation at the hostel vary. Earnings appear to have been between £3 and £4 per week, and deductions for accommodation, between 30 shillings and £2 (although the latter appears high). Workers under 18 years of age were paid less.[339]

The foreign workforce continued to be carefully monitored during this time. At the training centre they could turn to the female instructors for help, or they could also go to hostel staff or designated female welfare officers. Occasionally these were EVWs themselves, now employed as translators, who knew from personal experience some of the worries and difficulties the new arrivals were likely to experience.[340] The women were also encouraged to attend language courses in the town. From time to time representatives of local clubs came to the hostel with invitations to join singing, arts and crafts or social clubs.[341] Dance evenings at the hostel were a further attraction, and were particularly popular with male EVWs living in the area. Polish, Ukrainian or Yugoslavian boyfriends were easy to come by, and several women 'got married very quickly'.[342]

Migrants who did not train as spinners or weavers started work immediately. Here they were taught by female colleagues and supervised by an overlooker (usually male). Many worked in the stubbing and roving stage of production, between the (male dominated) carding and the ring or mule spinning. Slubbing and roving was the stage where the combed, fibrous strips of cotton were put through various machines that fixed and strengthened them, after which the cotton could be wound on to great bobbins.[343] Handling and carrying these bobbins was heavy work, and the women were often helped by young male bobbin carriers. It was not until this process was complete that actual spinning could take place, and the later processes (winding and doubling) that eventually led to weaving.

It was rare to find, either in written sources or the interviews we conducted, comments suggesting that work at the mills served another purpose than to earn a living. The conditions were too tough for it to have been anything else, and recruits' comments were pragmatic: 'It is not the nicest job but it is very well paid', wrote Albine D. from Oldham in 1949 to her friend Gretl in Germany. 'I can earn more in a week here than I could in a month at home. I live in the hostel. Board and lodging is not expensive. Each week I have enough money left over to be able to buy a new pair of shoes or anything else that costs about the same.'[344] Gerda made similar remarks in a letter written in 1949 from Leigh to her mother. 'At the moment we are still being trained and earn £3 per week. Later on, when I can operate the machine alone, I will earn even more. As I am very careful with money, I can afford to put half my weekly wage to one side and save it.'[345] The similarities are obvious. Work was mentioned briefly, and purely as a means to earn money and fulfil material wishes. This alone justified the decision to come to Britain and the difficulties that had involved. The interviewees found the highly repetitive nature of the work less of a problem than the extreme working conditions: dust swirled constantly, it was very hot, and the noise of the machines made holding a normal conversation impossible. Experienced textile workers could lip read perfectly, and thus managed to hold long-range conversations whilst working. Anybody could join in with these discussions, but the foreigners had the additional difficulty of mastering this skill in a foreign language if they wanted to be able to communicate.

It is not clear how many women, who despite contractual agreements, simply gave up and returned to Germany. Nor is it known how many resorted to marriage to escape. Others resigned themselves to their predicament and tried to make the best of it. For some, what kept them going was a determination not to be seen as a failure: 'I would have loved to have gone home, but I had too much pride in me: I don't want to go back as a poor little girl. I want to save up and show that I have achieved something. And for this reason I was very hard on myself and stayed here.'[346] Most appear to have found the first few weeks of work at the mills particularly hard. There was so much to take in, in a foreign language, a strange environment, and a very different culture. Even those who had had training centre courses to ease the transition soon realised there was a big difference between training and the real thing. 'Sometimes I had nightmares. But after a while I got used to it. You get less nervous, you get faster, more nimble and somehow more sensitive working this fine stuff, because your fingers were completely sore.'[347]

Discrimination

Most post-war migrants from Europe experienced verbal abuse or some other form of discrimination, even if they did not refer to it directly when questioned: 'Generally friendly, but there were some, you know, now and then.'[348] 'In Huddersfield they were cautious.'[349] 'There was no problem at all. Only one man…'[350] Strictly speaking, the terms *foreigner* or *bloody foreigner* could be applied to anyone who was a stranger at the mill or in the town. Occasionally the locals would be a little more accepting: 'You are a foreigner if you come from anywhere outside Lancashire or Yorkshire.'[351] And, like everywhere in the world, there were locals willing to make exceptions for those they knew, 'these two over here or him next to me',[352] for example.

What is certain, as far as the world of work was concerned, is that the foreign workforce was repeatedly seen as a threat by local workers for a number of reasons. These included, above all, their widely observed refusal to join the trade union, the perception that they threatened normal working relations because they were more productive, and their willingness to work over-time or special shifts. The fact that they took shorter breaks and spent less time in the toilet also caused 'irritation'.[353] Decades later, several of the European migrants were still amazed at the number of breaks taken by their British workmates, which at the time they were not at all used to.[354] Most were proud of being hard working, enthusiastic and being seen as 'good workers'. They saw this as an attribute of their Polish, Ukrainian or German origins, and felt this set them apart from many British workers, who thought that such qualities were unimportant.[355] This attitude alienated them from their British colleagues, who saw in their enthusiasm a lack of solidarity.[356] Sometimes this was attributed to their national background. 'I think that must have been because that's how they had to do it, where he came from you see. He was alright like, he was very nice, but he was a really…really hard worker.'[357]

Several women who worked in the textile industry immediately after the war spoke of resentment towards the European migrants. They also mentioned a 'feeling amongst the workers' that the town was full of foreigners who were taking all the jobs.[358] In Trowbridge, weavers refused point blank to pass on their skills to the EVWs. Instead they offered to extend their normal working day by half an hour to prevent the employment of foreign labour.[359] In the mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, EVWs were soon a common sight and they attracted considerable attention. This is hardly surprising given the build-up of media coverage in the preceding few months, and the fact that the local press were particularly interested in the first groups of workers to arrive. There were reports on their backgrounds and, in some cases, personal histories were published in local papers. Occasionally these were accompanied by photographs, which was extremely unusual for the times as newspapers then generally consisted of page after page of unbroken text. Clothing and speech often made the migrants stand out—and footwear. In 1947 over half of the local mill girls in Bolton still wore the traditional wooden clogs. In fact, demand was so great that local manufacturers kept waiting lists, but foreign names were conspicuously absent from these lists.[360]

Despite being scattered throughout the country and immediately recognisable, the EVWs remained a minority. According to a Cotton Board survey of November 1947, there were 2,530 female EVWs working in 222 businesses in the cotton industry. Of these, 719 worked in 69 mills in Oldham, 514 in 46 mills in Bolton, and 359 in 32 mills in Rochdale,[361] which works out to approximately 10 EVWs per mill. Although numbers

rose significantly in the following months, the distribution remained largely the same across the region, with the exception of the main cotton centres where numbers of EVWs were slightly higher. In Bolton, for example, 1,036 foreign workers lived in a town with a total population of 236,000 (1951).[362] If EVWs were a minority in the cotton mills, female textile workers from the Sudetenland must have felt even more isolated. In October 1949, two women from Bolton and Bury reported that apart from themselves just three and two other women from the Sudetenland worked in their mills, respectively.[363] This was probably fairly typical. In contrast, the group of 25 women from the Sudetenland working at the Dunlop Mill in Rochdale amongst a workforce of 2,600 (10 per cent were foreign), was probably also an exception.[364]

Antipathy towards minorities was not (and still is not) related to the size of the group. Thus the ethnic German women from the Sudetenland experienced more discrimination than other groups of EVWs. The most striking evidence of this—and of the attitude of the local population generally—can be found in a speech made by the manager of the EVW Advice Bureau in Oldham at a public meeting in March 1950: 'How does the average person react to EVWs? […] There are three groups: 66 per cent do not consider the situation, 33 per cent resent them, and the rest are trying to help them. He added that many people were hostile to EVWs no matter what their nationality. 'But the Sudeten girls came off the worst.'[365] It is evident from these comments that the Sudeten Germans found themselves in a very difficult position at work, at least to begin with. It also seems that the official 'cover up'of their recruitment as DPs, and the government's decision not to inform the public, certainly contributed to the problem. They faced resentment and animosity from all sides, both from the British population and other foreign workers. Further, although they identified the situation as early as March 1948, the Ministry of Labour failed to come up with an effective preventative strategy.[366] This meant that the Sudeten Germans were, to a greater extent than other EVWs, left to fend for themselves.

The tensions of the time were obviously not forgotten by the women interviewed for this study, although most preferred not to talk about them. Margarete hinted at the conflicts she faced as a member of a group of Sudeten Germans who wanted to be accepted by the large local workforce in a cotton mill. She explained that initially she experienced 'very little animosity, actually', and that when it did arise, it was 'more from the Poles than from the English'.[367] Another Sudeten German, who was not prepared to talk in detail about the awful discrimination she suffered during her training and at her first mill job, described the behaviour of her former colleagues more directly: 'Some were really horrible to us. […] I think the women were even worse than the men. […] They usually called us "bloody foreigners" or "buggers".'[368]

To avoid conflict some women adopted a strategy more common among ex-POWs, that of hiding their national origins. During interviews we occasionally heard references to Germans from the Sudetenland who would certainly not wish to be interviewed as they had adopted a Czechoslovakian identity. This type of subterfuge often did work, but the migrants concerned lived in constant fear of being found out.[369] These tensions between the Sudeten Germans and their foreign and British colleagues, which appear to have been quite strong in several towns, may also have contributed to some women eventually deciding to leave the mills.

Hostels and lodgings

For many British workers, living in a hostel was part and parcel of working life. Hostels had mushroomed throughout the country during the Second World War as the government tried to plug the gap created by the decrease in housing stock while ensuring that the needs of the war economy were met. The majority of EVWs also started their British working life housed in state-run or private establishments. Residential buildings served as hostels, as did barracks, former POW camps and disused factories.[370] They varied in size from those accommodating a maximum of a dozen people to others that could house several hundred. There were also big variations in the comfort and facilities on offer. The spartan simply provided a place to eat and sleep. But others were more comfortable, and provided leisure activities (film shows, billiards, table tennis, sport and dance events), good bathrooms and laundries that included washing machines. In January 1949, the National Service Hostel Corporation operated 61 miner's hostels that catered for British workers as well as accommodating nearly 7,300 EVWs. The Corporation also ran 82 industrial hostels that housed 5,400 EVWs. Over 21,000 EVWs lived in establishments run by the Ministry of Agriculture, 3,000 were in War Office accommodation, and several thousand in private industrial hostels. It is estimated that at the beginning of 1949, 50,000 workers recruited in Europe were housed in this type of accommodation, and by 1956 there were up to 3,000 still in these lodgings.[371]

The National Service Hostel Corporation had three large hostels in the Lancashire cotton region. One of these, Glen Mill Hostel, has already been mentioned. There was also Woodlands House in Chorley, which took up to 1,000 residents.[372] The third, Chadwick House in Bolton, was much smaller, and housed just 56 EVWs in 1949.[373] These quasi-state run hostels and those operated by NGOs were only a small part of the hostel landscape. Most hostels were smaller establishments run by private operators contracted to factories or firms. In many cases the latter provided beds, bedding, cupboards and other equipment from the factory's warehouses.[374] At the end of 1947, the Cotton Board recorded 70 such hostels housing a total of 1,600 workers. By 1949, it had increased to over 100 hostels in Lancashire alone.[375]

At the same time as the number of hostels was growing, more recruited workers were moving out into private lodgings. In November 1947, 1,400 cotton workers had chosen this option.[376] This followed appeals from the Cotton Board for private lodgings to be made available that were carried in several newspapers in the summer of 1947. The campaign was particularly aimed at women who, although they could not work at the mills themselves, could help the country out of a crisis situation. The articles provided detailed information about the EVWs, designed to reassure potential landladies.[377] Unfortunately, the result of these rather vigorous appeals made by town councils and industry, based on a demand that had been over-estimated, eventually led to a surplus of accommodation and quite significant financial losses for some who had responded.[378]

The majority of recruited women were, in any case, inclined to leave the hostels as soon as they could find private lodgings alone or with a friend. In this respect, female workers differed from their (foreign) male colleagues, who preferred to remain in hostels where the basic housekeeping was taken care of. Those who moved out were not always satisfied with their landlords, feeling they were being financially exploited for example, and some returned temporarily to a hostel.[379] Due to the gradual decline of industry in the region and associated movement of people to other areas, it was easier to buy a house or

rent a room in Lancashire than it was in other parts of Britain. The 1931 census records Oldham's population standing at 140,314; by 1951 it had dropped to 121,212. This indicates that there was accommodation available, but it tells us nothing about its quality. 'We no longer live at the hostel, we live in private accommodation', wrote a Sudeten German woman to her family in 1949. 'To begin with we made every effort to leave the hostel, because we were afraid they would put us into another fleapit again. This time we got it right. We live near the factory. Our flat is a bed-sit with the use of a bathroom.'[380]

Also, some hostels could be less than comfortable. In November 1949 the head of the German branch of the International Catholic Association for the Protection of Young Women, Elisabeth Denis, visited a large, unspecified hostel in Rochdale. The thin-walled barracks slept 20 women to a room. These were inadequately heated with two stoves, so that it was even difficult to get warm in bed. Two Sudeten Germans brought feather duvets with them and were, at first, ridiculed. All the bathroom facilities were in a separate building, which could mean running through the rain at night.[381] But small hostels too, often left a lot to be desired in terms of hygiene and comfort. Elena was so horrified by the mice in her rooms in Oldham that she moved in with a Yugoslavian colleague who had bought a house and was renting rooms to between six and eight female colleagues.[382]

Other workers have happy memories of their hostel, recalling the 'clean, lovely rooms' or the community spirit amongst the room-mates.[383] Two things in particular were repeatedly mentioned in a positive light. First the bathrooms, with 'beautiful bath tubs and lots of hot water'.[384] And second the food—the good breakfasts, the evening meals, or the nice waitresses who gave out extra portions. The desire for the greater freedom that private lodgings or a shared flat offered was probably more important to those who had felt restricted in Germany or who had particularly bad memories of the cramped conditions in refugee camps.[385] But the animosity some women encountered in the larger, more anonymous hostels was also a significant factor. In the mills, to begin with at least, because they understood little English, the women were simply unaware of many of the negative comments made about them. In contrast, the common language in the hostels amongst EVWs was usually German.[386]

The move into private accommodation was in line with the government's views on assimilation. However, the housing shortage in some areas made the hostels a 'necessary evil' that even the cotton manufacturers eventually accepted. At the start, the latter had objected to this type of accommodation because they were convinced 'that the girls will get the community feeling more quickly if they can live with the British workers'.[387] The number of hostels and the residents they housed soon became an important yardstick for comparing towns. This explains the *Bolton Evening News'* proud boast, shortly before Christmas 1949, that the 1,400 EVWs working there 'have been absorbed into the communal life of the town and only the difference in tongue draws attention to many of them'. Only 150 women were still living in hostels there, whereas in Oldham there were over 500 'and many of them are cut off from English life'.[388]

Another problem was the antagonism among residents that often broke out along national lines. In the YWCA hostel, Kelsterton Hall near Flint, there were even problems with the first group of residents 'as the various Nationals would not share bedroom accommodation'.[389] Multi-national hostels were often the scene of arguments and violence and were not popular.[390] Problems between Poles and Ukrainians were as

frequent as problems between Poles and Irish, or Serbs and Croats. The Ministry of Labour received many reports of disputes between EVWs and 'coloured workers', usually Jamaicans.[391] 'Serious fighting' between these two groups was reported at the Greenbank Hostel, Leeds, in September and December 1947, and also in January 1948. Similar incidents were reported at Sherburn-in-Elmet Hostel in November 1947 and January 1948, at Castle Donnington Hostel, Derbyshire, in August 1948, and at the Weston-on-Trent Hostel in September 1948. Following this, the number of Jamaican migrants per hostel was restricted to 10 per cent, with a maximum of 30 allowed per establishment.[392]

Arguments that turned physical did not only involve men. 'Violent disputes' were reported in women's hostels,[393] and as with those involving men, were not limited to European migrants, Jamaicans or Irish either. Disputes involving (white) Britons were reported, which, as one member of the British Council of Churches pointed out, 'did not promote friendliness toward England'.[394] One official report put it in much clearer terms: 'In theory it would appear an excellent practice, but in fact it is very doubtful whether good results can be expected. Unfortunately, the British hostel resident is seldom a worthy citizen, and it would be tragic if the foreign worker judged our civilisation by the many unstable and reckless casual labourers who drift from hostel to hostel in some areas.'[395]

Leisure, friends and partners

Hostel life had both advantages and disadvantages for the newly arrived workers, and whether or not they enjoyed their stay seemed to depend on expectations and circumstances. Some enjoyed having their breakfast and their evening meals provided and not having to deal with difficult landlords. Others saw this as a restriction of their personal freedom and independence. Initially the hostels also seemed to function partly as a refuge or sanctuary where the recruits could meet others who had shared similar fates, talk in their native languages, swap ideas, make friends and simply spend evenings or weekends relaxing together. Because the noise, language problems and racial tensions made getting to know people in the mills very difficult, the social role played by hostels became particularly important. Being able to meet with others in the same boat made it easier to bear the homesickness and isolation, and gave them someone else to share the humiliation and hurt that the derogatory remarks and insults from fellow workers caused them. It was also reassuring to be able to talk about everyday embarrassments, such as mix-ups with money or language. It is probably for these reasons that some look back to their evenings in the hostel, listening to the radio and knitting, with so much nostalgia. Weekends too were often spent together, going on long walks, or to the cinema or window shopping. Those in Rochdale could go to the church services organised by the German Pallottine sisters who had a convent there, or on other excursions that the sisters organised.[396]

When the interviewees talked about first meeting the man they would eventually marry, the sense of the loneliness and homesickness they must have felt all those years ago came through strongly. Of the 9 Sudeten Germans interviewed, only 1 married a British man, 5 married Ukrainians, 2 married Poles and 1 a Yugoslavian. The 3 ethnic Germans interviewed married a Yugoslavian, a Hungarian and a Lithuanian, respectively.

This pattern is also reflected in the records of Salford's Alien Register. Eleven of the 29 women from the Sudetenland listed got married. Two married Poles, 3 British men and 4 chose Ukrainian partners. In the remaining two cases, the husband's nationality was not recorded.[397] Interestingly, there is a distinctive difference between the partners chosen by women recruited under Westward Ho and those recruited under North Sea. Of the 10 North Sea women who married, 8 chose British partners, while the 2 women who worked in the textile industry did not.

Working conditions and different cultural backgrounds could be sources of great friction, but they could also bring people closer together. The different groups were attracted to each other for a variety of reasons. However, it appears that the foreign men found it particularly difficult to form close relationships with women. Most came as singles, and a study published in 1958 records that 40–50 per cent of the male EVWs had at that stage still not married. Indeed, later records show that 80 per cent of these men never married. Those EVWs who did marry tended to choose someone of the same nationality. Where this was not the case, partners were often British, and of the other nationalities, Germans and Italians feature more often.[398] Those who failed to find a husband or wife, or to escape the isolation of the hostels, were more likely to suffer mental problems. Instances of this, which unfortunately sometimes resulted in suicide, were higher amongst the foreign workforce than the local population, and particularly high for male recruits.[399]

According to those we interviewed, loneliness, a common language, and the social skills of their partner were what attracted the Sudeten Germans to their partner. Language was particularly important. As one interviewee said: 'If you are alone in a foreign country and someone comes along who speaks your language and can also dance….'[400] Henrike met her future husband at a sort of marriage market organised by some Ukrainian workers. 'I met my husband on New Year's Eve. We were invited by a Ukrainian, who could speak German. […] We decided the hostel would go to Manchester. I must say, those were very, very nice Ukrainians. They had a very long table and there was sausage on it, the like of which we had never been able to get in England. And *Schwarzbrot* and loads of stuff from the continent, which we ate. *Sauerkraut* and all.'[401]

Very few, however, claimed to have had happy marriages. Most felt they had 'fallen blindly' and rushed in to what turned out to be unhappy liaisons. When asked why the relationships failed, several hinted at cultural differences, although these could be difficult to articulate. One interviewee declared: 'Well, most of them got divorced, because the Poles and Ukrainians expected us to have the same sort of culture as their women; to give birth and then be up and on our feet again within the hour.'[402] There were also references to husbands expecting wives to return to paid jobs as soon as possible after the birth of a baby, and furthermore, to do all the housework and entertain the husband's (traditionally) numerous house guests. The main complaint was being seen primarily as a contributor to a household income that was managed by the husband.

Most of the Sudeten Germans were very young when recruited. Several had not legally come of age and therefore still needed parental consent before marrying. Views expressed about marriage in the interviews correspond with, and are reinforced by, documentary sources. Social worker Cäcilia Tilgner reported from Rochdale in November 1950: 'Actually we hear about one or two girls every day who have got married. In many cases, the women are already pregnant before the wedding. The men

are usually Ukrainian, Latvian or Lithuanian and sometimes hardly speak a word of English. If you ask the girls how things are going, you will get an evasive answer; it is not how they expected it to be. These are not happy marriages. There is not enough money of course, and the woman continues to work in the factory; the baby is taken to the factory nursery, and in the evening "family life" is spent in a room, in one of these mostly awful hostels.'[403] Such situations usually led to unhappy or broken marriages, unwanted pregnancies, and abortions.[404] Marriage often bound the Sudeten German women to Britain, turning what had been a temporary working visit into a permanent stay. In contrast, those who went through the cotton crisis of 1952 as single, independent women, were able to re-orientate their lives, either by taking advantage of the opportunity to change jobs, or by leaving the country and its little loved mills for good.

The textile crisis of 1952

The worldwide textile crisis of 1952 hit the export orientated British cotton industry particularly hard. The rising cost of living and price of raw materials, triggered by the Korean War, led to a rapid fall in the demand for textiles and the loss of markets that had only recently opened up.[405] The situation reminded older workers of the vulnerability of their trade. For younger workers used to full employment and labour shortages the shortened working hours and unemployment were a new experience. The key concern for mill owners was losing the confidence that they had so laboriously managed to rebuild; for the unions it was whether or not to invoke the redundancy clause that meant foreign workers would be the first to lose their jobs.[406]

The first signs of trouble appeared towards the end of 1951. On 4 December the *Manchester Guardian* reported several remarks made by Alice Foley, head of the Bolton and District Weavers' and Winders' Association, in her quarterly report. These called for the position of the foreign workforce to be reviewed in the event of rising unemployment. Foley maintained that although market difficulties were still small, there was cause for concern.[407] Two weeks later, a small article in the *Times* reported that various mills in Rochdale and Wigan were extending their Christmas break due to economic difficulties. In Rochdale, this affected 3,000 workers in 12 different firms. In Wigan, it was 7,000 workers in 9 firms.[408] In December 1951, 25,000 textile workers were officially registered unemployed,[409] and by May 1952 when the crisis reached its peak, the number had risen to 143,000. In addition, there was widespread shortening of working hours for those not laid off. Between March and May 1952 there was a rapid increase in the reports of short-time work, unemployment and temporary closures carried in the national press, and it was not until June that the first signs of improvement began to appear. Easter had been a particularly difficult period, with many mills closing for at least a week and sometimes two. For example, all the mills in Blackburn, 65–70 mills in Bolton, 33 in Burnley, and 22 in Oldham closed down completely for at least a week. In Oldham, a further 59 mills introduced short-time work. This affected 5,000 workers (15 mills) in Preston, and 11,000 workers (up to 50 mills) in Rochdale.[410] By the end of 1952, when the numbers of unemployed had fallen to the level of the previous year, the cotton industry had lost 14,000 male and 27,000 female workers, and the total workforce had shrunk from 318,000 to 277,000.[411]

Written accounts of the consequences of the crisis for the foreign workers are contradictory. The records clearly show that the number of foreigners in psychiatric hospitals rose during this period.[412] Generally, however, opinions are divided on the overall effect the crisis had on EVWs. In his study on Polish migrants in Britain, Jerzy Zubrzycki argues that during the crisis the majority of the EVWs were made redundant, and either took up jobs in another industry or emigrated to a third country.[413] Jacques Vernant states that the burden of redundancy was shared equally between local and foreign labour,[414] a view shared by Maud Bülbring and E.Nagy. The latter maintain that it was just this type of fairness that led to many EVWs, who until then had lived in a state of uncertainty due to the redundancy clause,[415] seeing their host country and its local workforce in a much more positive light. As a consequence, Maud Bülbring concluded in an earlier study, interest in further emigration to a third country actually fell.[416]

If it had been left up to some of the local trade unions the foreign workers would certainly have been the first to be laid off. Discussions supporting this course of action began in January 1952 and continued almost throughout the crisis.[417] According to a survey undertaken at the time, most union officials felt it would be impossible to make use of the clause because it would be difficult to replace the experienced foreign workers with British workers.[418] But this view did nothing to ease ill feeling amongst union members. When a firm in Darwen made several of its British part-time workers redundant on 1 April, it provoked a lengthy dispute between the employers and the unions. Management maintained that the agreements covered full-time workers only and not part-time workers or those on short-time. The unions were not satisfied with this interpretation and demanded the reinstatement of the British workers, greater protection for local workers, and the dismissal of foreign workers.[419] But the employers stuck to their position. As far as they were concerned the recession was just a passing phase, and they did not want to lose their foreign workforce permanently through premature redundancies.[420]

The economic consequences of short-time work or unemployment varied according to the individual's circumstances. British families were generally in a better position to cope because they could fall back on other sources of income, they had property or savings perhaps, or could rely on support from relatives. This was also the position of those EVWs who had married or bought their own homes. Many took in lodgers and were thus able to weather the crisis.[421] The majority of the EVWs were not married, but the financial cushion they had managed to save, together with their residency in Britain, proved crucial. Most had been employed long enough to qualify for unemployment benefits, and by now many were also legally able to change jobs or industries. This was only possible because the previous restrictions were lifted on 1 January 1951, but changing jobs was still conditional upon having lived in Britain for a minimum of three years.[422]

The situation was rather different for the Sudeten German, Austrian and Italian women, all of whom had arrived more recently. They had had less time to save and found it difficult to survive on the unemployment benefit alone. The 26 shillings dole money they received each week did not go far when a bed at the hostel averaged 35 shillings a week. Trade union members worried about their unemployed colleagues. 'Many of these foreign girls—some of whom are only eighteen years old—have been in tears when I told them we could do nothing to help them', Mr Milhence (Secretary, Oldham and District

Weavers' and Winders' Association) told a *Chronicle* reporter. 'All that I could do was to send them to the National Assistance Board. The position is serious. The girls might well be driven on to the streets for want of something being done for them.'[423]

Social worker Cäcilia Tilgner reported that most of the Sudeten Germans possessed some savings. Only 1 in 10 she questioned were without funds at the beginning of the crisis. She also heard about women who had found 'other ways' to supplement their income, in other words they had turned to prostitution. Some of the women she interviewed complained about their financial situation and the unaccustomed limitations put on their spending.[424] Most responded to the situation by moving to a new job, a new region, or even a new country. There was a further relaxation of restrictions after Easter 1952. Now anyone could change occupation, provided they did so via a labour exchange, where they were strongly encouraged to enter the NHS or domestic service.

It is unclear how many Sudeten Germans followed the advice of the labour exchanges, or even how many were still employed in the cotton industry when the crisis began. It is also difficult to estimate how many went on to emigrate during the course of 1952. As early as the latter half of 1951, having fulfilled their contracts many decided to leave and return to Germany. They left the mills to find better work or simply because they had achieved what they had set out to do.[425] In January 1952, Cäcilia Tilgner noted that 'some girls packed their suitcases sooner than expected, because they were afraid of one day being made redundant and sent back home. […] In the atmosphere of an apparent shortage of jobs, several have even experienced ill-feeling towards foreign workers again.'[426]

The Sudeten Germans, like the EVWs in general, reacted proactively to the cotton crisis. There is nothing to suggest that they were disproportionately laid off,[427] and like other workers, many were put on short-time. As the crisis reached its height in May 1952, 630 Sudeten Germans were unemployed.[428] Many decided to leave the textile industry for good. Although they could not return to their homes in Czechoslovakia, they could return to Germany. For the other EVWs a return home was not an option, irrespective of the propaganda put out by some Eastern Block countries.[429] Figures from the Dunlop Mill in Rochdale give an indication of the size of the migration; in August 1952 the number of staff fell from 3,000 to 2,500. During this period the number of foreign employees fell from 300 to 91, and of these only 6 Sudeten Germans remained from the total of 25 who had started work there.[430]

4
Welfare and support

During their first few years in Britain the European recruits received a lot of support from local authorities, companies, churches and voluntary organisations. In line with the government's approach to assimilation, these organisations focussed their activities largely on explaining British customs and bringing locals and foreigners together. The Ministry of Labour took responsibility for basic living conditions in the initial stage of this process. It organised members of the WVS or English speaking migrants, specifically employed for the purpose, to accompany the newly arrived workforce from the ship to their camps and hostels. Together with the National Service Hostels Corporation, the ministry was responsible for the reception and holding camps and state-run hostels. It organised food and clothing, ration books and clothing coupons as well as pocket money and medical assistance.[1] The ministry also liased between the British public and the recruits, telling the public about them, and explaining to the foreign workers British habits and working practices. In collaboration with the Central Office for Information, it produced and distributed the brochures *To Help You Settle in Britain,* and *Contemporary Life in Britain.*

The Ministry of Labour rejected calls to establish a separate body to 'watch the interests of these workers and be prepared to advise them during the initial period of their residence in this country'.[2] In deciding to use the 'usual welfare machinery' it sent a clear message that the foreign workers were to be considered equal to the British and that no distinctions would be made on the basis of national origin. Thus, the ministry looked to the existing network of regional and local welfare officers to support the recruits. This network became responsible for advising the workers, investigating complaints, visiting workplaces and hostels and introducing workers to local clubs, associations, churches and other institutions.[3]

The government took the same integrated approach when it came to educational activities. Helping the migrants learn English, as soon as possible so that they could mix with the local community, was a key priority. To achieve this, an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Education to run language courses in holding camps. But this special measure only applied to the camps. Once they had started work, the foreign workers were expected to attend existing courses provided by the Ministry of Education,[4] although, local authorities were encouraged to offer additional evening classes if there was an obvious need.[5] Occasionally some of the larger NGOs, especially the WVS, became involved in this work.

In practice the system functioned somewhat haphazardly, which prompted the Ministry of Education to set up an official inquiry during the early months of 1949. The results were disappointing: Having been in the country for 18 months, thousands of EVWs had little or no English, while others only spoke enough for the most basic shopping purchases. According to the report, part of the reason for this was the difficulty

organising language courses for foreigners who diverged so much in terms of intelligence, education, age and previous experience. Furthermore, interest on the part of the EVWs had been extremely low. Only 5 per cent had attended classes, and they were usually those with the least need. The reasons for the low uptake varied. After a long day in the factory many were too tired to attend a night class. Added to this was the fact that for those hoping to return home soon there seemed little point in learning English. A consequence of these factors was that the workers stayed segregated in different national groups.[6] The mining industry was the one exception. Safety considerations meant that workers had to reach a satisfactory level of English before they were allowed to work their first shift.[7] In comparison to the EVWs, of whom it is estimated only 10 per cent had any previous knowledge of English, the ex-POWs had a clear advantage. Many had learnt English at school, or had managed to pick it up in the post-war period or whilst being held as POWs.[8]

In addition to helping the recruits gain language skills the government also wanted them to get an understanding of the British way of life, and to further this endeavour several government departments, NGOs and large employers joined forces. During the exercise a real sense of community commitment often emerged, and this led to the opening of Citizen's Advice Bureaus in many towns.[9] In January 1948, for example, a community centre for EVWs was officially opened in Oldham. The opening ceremony was attended by the mayor, the head of the local labour exchange, and representatives of local organisations and associations. Speeches were translated into the Baltic languages, Polish, Russian and German. At the suggestion of the Rotary Club, several local organisations met a month later to discuss setting up an information bureau. With the help of various civic authorities, just such an office opened a short while later within the TOC-H building. This offered courses in English three evenings a week, and there were plans to provide a further course on Saturday mornings to avoid clashes with work. The public library, meanwhile, started carrying copies of foreign newspapers. During this period repeated appeals were made to the public to invite foreign workers into their homes, to encourage them to participate in sports and the Ministry of Labour's cultural activities and to make more private accommodation available to them.[10]

The Advisory Welfare Officer for German Women

Employing German sociologist, Maria Roos, as its Advisory Welfare Officer for German Women in Great Britain obviously represented something of a departure from its policy of equal and integrated treatment for all, irrespective of their country of origin, for the Ministry of Labour. Maria Roos started work in June 1950 and stayed until the end of October 1951. One of her duties was 'to advise the Ministry on general questions affecting the welfare of German women workers in this country and to assist her fellow-nationals in resolving their personal problems'.[11]

Exactly how the decision that German women needed this special appointment came about remains unclear, as no records from the office in St James's Square, where Maria Roos worked with a colleague and a secretary, have survived. As a result of this lack of hard evidence a number of different explanations have emerged. The most plausible is based on a letter written by Elisabeth Denis, who was at that time the Head of the

Nationalverband der katholischen Mädchenschutzvereine (National Federation of Catholic Associations for the Protection of Young Women). In the letter Elisabeth Denis states that she had been told by a German official in Bonn that the Ministry of Labour had requested 'a German Lady', apparently because 'the English stand accused, in the Soviet Press, of carrying out a "slave trade". To counter these accusations the English wish to employ a German woman, on a temporary basis, to work from her own administrative office, with full rights to inspect all aspects of working conditions.'[12]

Once in London Maria Roos quickly set up an information and advice bureau of considerable capacity. In her first few weeks in the job she introduced herself to the various departments of the Ministry of Labour, the German General Consulate, church groups and charitable organisations. She also made her presence known to key labour exchanges throughout the country and contacted newspapers and television broadcasters. Advertising her presence to the German workforce was also a priority. In this she seems to have been successful: in the first 10 months alone, her bureau received 1,852 letters and 1,556 personal visits. She and her two colleagues also took between 30 and 50 telephone calls a day. Roos made official visits, lasting several days each, to Nottingham, Bristol and Manchester. She also made day trips to Cambridge, Surrey and Sussex, where she learnt about working conditions in hospitals and was able to talk to the German women working in them.[13]

In October 1951, Maria Roos' welfare work was taken over by the German General Consulate, and finally, in 1952, the Deutscher Sozialausschuß (German Welfare Council) was established with the assistance of the German Foreign Office.[14]

Workplace support

The EVWs and recruited Germans also received support in their work places. In the larger factories welfare facilities were relatively extensive, whereas for those working as domestics, provisions were much more limited. In rural areas, assistance was often offered by local churches and voluntary organisations only.

Usually the local welfare officer would begin work before the foreign workers had even arrived. The first problem to overcome was finding accommodation. Advertisements would be placed, properties viewed and contracts signed before accommodation could be reserved. Many dwellings and privately run hostels had to be supplied with furniture, bedding and household goods, often from former POW camps.[15] The welfare officer would also be responsible for transporting the EVWs from the camps to their new workplace and accommodation. Occasionally a welcome party was organised, with food, and maybe a film and dancing.[16] The officers would then be on hand for all sorts of advice and information. They would distribute brochures, provide bed linen or household utensils and try to defuse any tensions or arguments that arose at work.[17]

Welfare officers in the cotton mills received support from the Cotton Board. An example of this was a clothes collection sponsored by the Board to help needy workers, whose outward appearance often provoked feelings of great pity: 'Most of the refugees had lost nearly all their possessions in their enforced flight from home, and it was pitiful to see them arrive with their few belongings wrapped up in a blanket. […] Many girls

arrived at the textile mills with no underclothes and few outer garments. One goodlooking young woman wore a skirt which she had made herself from the trousers of a German soldier and a blouse made from old socks which she had unpicked and re-knitted.'[18] The Cotton Board provided interpreters, who were able to help defuse misunderstandings both in and outside the mills, and for a number of years the Board employed its own welfare officer. This was an English woman from Sheffield who had married a Russian refugee and lived with him in Riga between 1925 and 1941. During the Second World War she had also spent time in Germany. For many years she visited workers in the mills and hostels, advising them and their employers, and mediating where necessary.[19]

Very little information is available on relationships between the trade unions and the foreign workforce, or the extent to which the union supported the recruits. However, it appears that relationships between the two parties were characterised by tension, and this was especially true in the textile industry. Comments made by individual trade union officials, about the redundancy clause or the unwillingness of many EVWs to join the union, for example, often appeared in newspaper articles. These comments would refer to the agreement on compulsory union membership and threats to end agreements with employers who employed foreigners. Initially, the fact that few EVWs joined unions could have been due to language problems, as union officials had difficulty making themselves understood to the new arrivals. But in later years, a widespread politically motivated antipathy towards the trade unions emerged.[20] The mutual animosity dominated press reports of the day, which complicated our efforts to make an accurate estimate of how the trade unions contributed to the welfare of the foreign workforce. We were able to find only occasional references to union support, such as that of the Transport and General Workers Union which put female hospital workers in touch with 'social circles' and was concerned about the transport problems of those in remote areas.[21] Day-to-day local union business was rarely considered important enough to publish, but it would be wrong to conclude from this that foreign union members were treated any differently to locals. As the events of the textile crisis of 1952 illustrate, in certain instances the unions were quite supportive of the EVWs.

British voluntary organisations

British voluntary organisations were given a special role in the Ministry of Labour's approach to assimilation: to bring migrants and locals together at a local level. How successful they were in accomplishing this is difficult to assess. The majority of interviewees could not remember having had any contact with British organisations during their early years in Britain. No doubt, the language barrier had something to do with this. But there was probably also a lack of interest on the part of the recruits who, after long hours in the factory, were too tired to participate in any organised leisure activities and preferred to spend their free time with friends. Several critical references to the efforts of NGOs can be found in the literature of the 1950s. Francesca Wilson criticised the work done by many of the voluntary organisations on behalf of foreign workers on the grounds that it lacked the commitment found in their social work abroad.[22] Maud Bülbring saw them losing interest 'after asking the refugees many times

without response'.[23] But on the basis of the extensive and detailed information in Ministry of Labour records and contemporary press reports, what is most striking is the amount of local and regional activity that did go on throughout the country, especially in the late 1940s. This involved large organisations, such as Rotary, or the TOC-H, whose role in setting up an Information Office in Oldham has already been described. But other clubs and associations, some well known some not, also got involved. For example, the Globe Trotters' Association organised an international Christmas party in Bolton, the Birmingham Association of Girls and Mixed Clubs made rooms available for European migrants needing a break in a holiday home, and the International Friendship League in Hastings put on concerts for the EVWs and also invited them into their rooms on a weekly basis.[24]

The approach taken and activities offered were similar, irrespective of the region, the size of the organisation or its philosophy. To make contact with the workers, several members of these groups would visit hostels, put up posters and notices and invite the workers to evening or weekend events. They included dances, social evenings, film shows, a club meeting or a local excursion. An invitation from a British household was considered a particularly effective way of introducing the foreigners to the British way of life. Rooms were also made available for foreign workers who wanted to form their own clubs or groups.

Another pattern that emerged was local organisations working together and coordinating their efforts. Late in 1948, the Ministry of Labour asked its regional offices to compile reports on charitable activities going on around the country.[25] This produced a deluge of reports from all over the country which, despite the geographical diversity, all exhibited the same aims and objectives and, according to their authors, were all achieving a measure of success: 'There can be no doubt that the work of voluntary bodies has done much to help the EVWs to feel at home, to introduce them to local activities and English families, help with their problems and, which is equally important, help to break down local prejudice against their employment and absorption into the British community.'[26]

Almost all the reports emphasised the work done by the WVS. Founded in 1938 this organisation consisted of 12 regional subdivisions, 10 of which were in England and 1 each in Scotland and Wales. The headquarters were in London, and the president during this period was the highly esteemed Dowager Marchioness of Reading. In May 1939, the organisation numbered 256,000 members. By August 1939, this had risen to 336,000, and numbers continued to increase during the war.[27] In 1940, the WVS played a leading role in evacuating 1.25 million people from towns and cities to the countryside. Amongst them were some 700,000 children who travelled without their parents. Some 108,000 women accompanied and helped care for the children during the journey and when they reached their destination. They organised collections of clothing, and together with local authorities, arranged accommodation.[28] The work carried out by the WVS during the war, which also included establishing mobile or permanent canteens, collecting and sorting goods and raw materials and even caring for local invalids, did not end in 1945. Almost immediately there were new challenges—and people—needing the same sort of response.

Members of the WVS were there to meet foreign workers when their ships docked and to accompany them by bus or train to their camps. They collected clothes to stock the stores they provided in the camps so that needy new arrivals could adequately clothe themselves. They provided unpaid English teachers and translators, translated the most

useful English phrases into 11 different languages, organised excursions, put on tea parties and other events at their meeting places, and invited foreigners into their own homes. They provided extra support for pregnant women and unmarried mothers with children. In the camps, they checked hygiene standards and successfully campaigned for female welfare officers to be employed there.[29] The work of the WVS generally took place behind the scenes. It was characterised by a 'personal touch' that dealt with the EVWs—many of whom had experienced years of forced labour camps—as individuals.[30] Only rarely were their activities reported by the media as, for example, when the first group of women recruited under the Balt Cygnet Scheme arrived, and each received a new overcoat (a present from Canada) and a second-hand pair of shoes.[31] But despite the apparent lack of media attention, the green uniforms of the WVS were an everyday sight on the streets of wartime and post-war Britain. Local social clubs tended to be the venue for all non-work activities. Here foreign workers could meet alone or with British women to relax. As well as providing entertainment, dancing, music and sport, language courses and discussion evenings were offered and a selection of books and magazines together with advice on all problems imaginable made available.[32]

A report from Gainsborough on the WVS' involvement with a German domestic is a good illustration of the organisation's personal approach—and also the unorthodox methods it used. The case began in February 1949 when the local labour exchange asked the WVS to help with a German domestic who, given the labour exchange's involvement, appears to have been recruited on a government-sponsored programme to work in a hardship household. The authorities were particularly anxious that the intervention should be a success, as the previous German domestic working there had proved unacceptable. A conversation with the housewife revealed that, in her opinion, there were two problems: first, the new employee did not understand enough English to follow her instructions, and second the housewife did not want her employee constantly in the house. However, she also did not want her to go out and fall into 'bad company' as her predecessor had done. To end the misunderstandings, the WVS co-opted one of their elderly members, a German woman who had moved to Britain at the beginning of the century. To begin with she translated a description of the girl's domestic duties. Furthermore, it was agreed that the domestic should visit the WVS club on evenings that the old lady was on duty; 'she was able to explain the money, teach her English, and tell her the British point of view'. In a short space of time the girl started to feel at home in the club and would spend her leisure time there. Other members started taking her with them to the cinema, or dancing or even shopping. But it was soon felt that the German housemaid needed 'younger company', so the ladies looked for other young German women in the area. They managed to find two themselves, and others were referred to them by the labour exchange, so that the number of regular German visitors to the club soon rose to ten. The club soon became a permanent meeting place for this group: 'Saturday sees them all coming straight to the club where we have a room set aside for their use; they do their shopping, leave their parcels, make themselves coffee and have something to eat, play the radiogram, dance and have sing-songs round the piano. They know that they will find someone to talk to, go to the cinema with, etc.' They were also allowed to bring their boyfriends to the club—'thus we are able to keep a bit of a check on the sort of man they are meeting'—several of whom were former German POWs. The WVS women developed a strong sense of responsibility for their German members and made the club

available for them to celebrate their birthdays and a Christmas party. They also made sure the girls were not cheated by 'unscrupulous traders'. The report concluded by stating that: 'We feel that this is a job of work of the utmost importance. […] These young people are writing home every week, and we get messages from "Vater" and "Mutter" thanking us for our care of their girls, some are going home on holiday, and we feel they will be the best possible ambassadors for the British way of life and will do much to further the cause of the western democracies.'[33]

German organisations

In contrast to other European migrants, who were quick to form clubs along country lines, the German migrants rarely formed specifically German organisations. There are a variety of reasons for this. First, they lacked institutional reference points. In contrast to the Polish community, which had developed organisations for soldiers during the war,[34] most German organisations had not survived the First World War. The fact that the German migrants were so widely dispersed throughout the country was certainly also a factor, as were the high numbers intent on returning to Germany, or the desire not to stand out. It is also significant that many of the former POWs were naturally very independent, a trait that was not conducive to forming or joining groups on the basis of nationality or ethnicity.[35] But perhaps the most important reason was the very different personal circumstances existing between the groups. Most of the EVWs could not, or simply did not wish to, return to their homelands in communist eastern Europe, although many still hoped for political change and a possible return in the future. For this group, remaining in contact with their fellow countrymen in Britain was vitally important. This emphasis on contact and a strong sense of belonging to a cultural group resulted in the passing on of culture and language to the next generation.[36] For the German migrants things were very different. Even if they intended staying in Britain for some length of time, they were soon able to afford to visit relatives and go on holiday to Germany. It seems that only when they reached retirement did they start to meet more often and regularly with other Germans.

There is very little information concerning German clubs that started in the immediate post-war period, but the few sources available suggest that those formed did so mainly in conjunction with churches or on the initiative of local people. This was the case with the Deutsche Club in Motherwell, which was founded by the Presbyterian minister. A women's club was initiated in Glasgow by 'a couple of women of German descent' and several war brides,[37] and the Anglo-German-Austrian Circle and War Brides Club in London was established by a former member of the British Control Commission. The club was an information resource rather than a social one.[38]

Several church and religious organisations also became involved, the best known being the German YMCA in London. This organisation was originally founded in 1860 but, like most German institutions in Britain, was badly affected by both world wars. In 1939, its headquarters at Westgate House were closed down. Post-war activities began in 1945 with discussions on how best to support the work being done for German POWs. Organised by the World YMCA, the initial General Meeting was held in St George's Church[39] in London's East End. The church remained a focal point and a meeting place

for older members for many years. Its main purpose was to give financial and material assistance to clergymen carrying out pastoral work in the camps. On 21 December 1947, the group organised a Christmas celebration for German POWs in Forest Hill. In 1948, with many Germans now deciding to remain in Britain, support for a new German YMCA started to emerge. Initially the organisation saw its primary role as offering support to civilian workers both inside and outside the camps, and as early as March 1948 building a new German YMCA hostel was considered.[40] In 1948, the group started publishing a regular news pamphlet again, but it was not until 1949 that a key objective was realised with a move to the Landale Hall Hostel and Centre in Hampstead. In 1959, they relocated to Craven Terrace House, with a final move in 1973 to the New Lancaster Hall Hotel, their current offices.[41]

In 1949, the German YMCA held its first *Londoner Woche* (London Week), in which it tried to reach out to former POWs living outside London: 'The idea was to get about 20 men to spend a week in London and arrange a full programme comprising lectures, sightseeing tours, entertainment, etc.'[42] The first two events of this kind were deemed successful, but by 1950, it was already proving difficult to get farm workers down to London for a week. The registration fee of £7.5 and the shortage of holidays for farm workers were probable causes.[43] For these reasons the German YMCA's sphere of activity became mainly restricted to Greater London. For a number of years the Employment Service, founded in 1951, also offered support to German migrants. In 1960, its work was taken over by the Verein für Internationale Jugendarbeit (Society for International Youth Work) based in Bonn.

The German YMCA of the post-war period was notable in the very relaxed view of the 'M' in its title, and thus 'a group of young German girls, who had only arrived from their own country the day before' took part in an Advent celebration as early as 5 December 1949.[44] A few months later, an article appeared in the news pamphlet announcing that, 'in the due course of time "a new" area of work' had been found.[45] These female members made a vital contribution to consolidating the YMCA, which waited in vain during the initial post-war period for a flood of young men to join. By 1952, 133 of the 237 members were female, and in the previous 12 months alone, 95 women and just 55 men had joined the German YMCA.[46]

There were also several specifically Catholic organisations active in the post-war years. The Caritasverband was a charitable association based in Germany that worked to support POWs and civilian workers. This organisation wrote letters and sent reading material to those in hostels or on farms. They experienced the usual problems in getting addresses, and by the summer of 1948, had managed to write to just 680 workers, of which only 20 per cent replied.[47] The most active organisation was the German National Federation of Catholic Associations for the Protection of Young Women, based in Freiburg. Its chairwoman, Elisabeth Denis, made a lengthy visit to Britain in November 1949 that included inspecting cotton mills in Lancashire.[48]

At the time of Elisabeth Denis's visit, there were already two Germans living in the Pallottiner Convent in Rochdale who were heavily involved in the care of migrants: the former POW chaplain Father August Mücke, and lay helper Johanna Verhoeven. The latter arrived in Manchester in 1948 to work as a domestic servant, although she also intended to take school exams at the Pallottiner School, where her aunt worked, and then go on to study.[49] Working with Father Mücke, Johanna Verhoeven focussed on the

Sudeten German women. She even received a small amount of money for her efforts from a government office in London. In the convent, which also provided religious services in Polish and Italian when needed, she helped organise social evenings, theatre visits and excursions (to places as far flung as Scotland and Rome). In addition, she visited workers in their hostels, and as a result of this gained an insight into the physical and emotional problems that often accompanied unwanted pregnancies and abortions.[50]

Evidently, Elisabeth Denis was so concerned by the scale of the work needing to be done that when she visited Rochdale the following year her organisation sent a full-time assistant to help. Cäcilia Tilgner arrived in Rochdale in October 1950, where she was to spend the next two years working with Father Mücke and Johanna Verhoeven. In a report dated July 1951, she described her activities as ‘belonging in the category of Priest’s work’.[51] Her duties included managing the card index that held all known addresses. Starting with 600 addresses, she had increased this to 3,000 by July 1950. This was thanks not only to her own research but also the efforts made by parishes in Germany, youth organisations and the German passport office that put information leaflets into passports. In addition to the card index, Cäcilia Tilgner’s office activities included sending out circulars and handling correspondence.[52]

House visits were also a fixed part of her duties. These were usually made in the evening as most women were at work during the day. By mid-1951, Cäcilia Tilgner had visited in some cases, on several occasions, 80–90 private hostels accommodating 2 or 3 young women, on average, and approximately 20 larger factory-owned hostels, each housing more than 10 German Catholics. In the larger hostels she tried to co-opt a helper who would inform the other women about ‘church services, consultation times, meetings, weekend and holiday plans’. She dealt with personal problems such as loneliness and hardship, illness, depression and nervous breakdowns, sackings and evictions, troubles with the police, court appearances, deportations or unwanted pregnancies. She also helped prepare for church services and religious meetings, and with religious instruction and saying the rosary. And finally, in an effort to reach out to Germans living or working outside the cotton industry and to extend support and coordination, she made an extensive tour of England, in February 1951, visiting Birmingham, London, Northampton, Leicester and Loughborough.[53]

In February 1952, Cäcilia Tilgner moved to London and took over St Lioba, a post she held until 1955. This was a house in Exeter Road in Kilburn that the Associations for the Protection of Young Women had acquired from a German emigrant, Johanna Maier-Hultschin, on very favourable terms. The house had club and meeting rooms, offices, a library and overnight accommodation. Cäcilia Tilgner’s departure from Rochdale was not solely due to the exodus of Sudeten Germans that began in 1951, but also due to difficulties between her and Father Mücke.[54] She left shortly before the textile crisis reached its climax, and had the full social consequences of it been foreseen then her departure may well have been postponed. Cäcilia Tilgner did return briefly to Rochdale in May and again in July 1952 ‘to offer help and advice in two exceptional cases’.[55]

Churches

The level of pastoral and social support given to the foreign workers, in their respective native languages, would have been virtually impossible without the help of British churches. In this respect the British Council of Churches played a significant role. Its Foreign Workers Committee supported over 50 clergymen of various nationalities and denominations, both financially and administratively. Further important contributions were made by the Lutheran World Federation, the Catholic Committee for European Workers (which sponsored 30 foreign priests), and churches in many of the migrants' home countries.[56] Locally, migrants were offered special support from the Anglican and nonconformist churches.[57] Relatively high numbers of first generation practising Catholics and Protestants preferred to stay with their native language churches, if this was possible given the process of consolidation that began in the early 1950s. In contrast, later generations were more likely to join local parishes.[58]

German churches in Britain developed in different ways after the Second World War. It seems that the Catholic church worked on the assumption that as soon as their members had learnt the English language they would quickly integrate with the local parish, whereas the Protestant-Lutherans did not foresee such a rapid integration. Therefore, with exceptions like St Boniface in London and a number of convents, the Catholic clergy in particular saw themselves playing a transitional role in the assimilation process. In the event, this period of transition was hastened by decreasing funding and personal support from Germany.

For several years following the end of the POW chaplaincies, there were four and occasionally five German Catholic clergymen working in Britain. In an effort to adequately cover their extensive geographies, they were forced to become itinerant clergymen. The above-mentioned Father August Mücke was based at the Pallottiner Convent and was responsible for the whole of central England until 1957. When he eventually left for South Africa, he was replaced by Father Bernhard Hessling, also a Pallottiner, who moved from Rochdale to Leicester where he remained until 1962. In turn, his successor, Father Bernhard Richter, moved his base from Leicester to Manchester, before leaving the church in 1972 to marry and move abroad. That ended the presence of a German Catholic clergyman in the area. The Deutsche Haus (German House) that Father Richter established in Manchester, and that many Sudeten Germans interviewed for this study still vividly remembered, was kept open until the late 1980s by Thilde Chalfont, a woman from Munich who had married a British man. Occasionally during this period, church services were held at the house with the help of priests from London.

During the 1950s, Father Guenther Dumont (Gemeinschaft von den heiligen Engeln; Community of the Holy Angels) was based in Bradford. Equipped with a car, he served the north-east of England and the whole of Scotland.[59] According to his first progress report, he travelled 7,425 km (4,615 miles) between March and December 1951, and during this period held 42 church services (with a total of 989 participants), heard 123 confessions, gave 127 holy communions, christened 7 children, married 6 couples, visited 54 'home or social evenings (dance)' and wrote 307 letters personally.[60] Travelling by motorcycle, Father August Kernebeck served the south-west of England from his home in Bristol. Also a member of the Community of the Holy Angels, Father Kernebeck worked

in the south-west from mid-1952 until 1954 when he returned to Germany for family reasons.[61] And finally, from the beginning of 1952 right up until 1986, Pallottiner Father Felix Leushacke held the post of Rector at the German St Bonifatious Mission in London.[62]

The appointment of Father Leushacke marked the start of systematic support for post-war migrants and the consolidation of pastoral work. His responsibilities included overseeing the rebuilding of the St Boniface Church in the East End of London, which was hit by four German bombs in 1940 and totally destroyed. Over time a temporary chapel, a meeting room and some provisional accommodation were erected on the site of the ruins. These temporary structures remained in place until 1960 when, in the wake of a legal battle with the Diocese of Westminster, a new church and vicarage were built. In 1970, a new parish community centre, Wynfrid House which contained sleeping facilities for up to 40 people in single rooms or dormitories, was built. The rebuilding was paid for by British compensation for war damage, which meant that the fact that the whole estate had been confiscated by the British government as a consequence of First World War turned out to be fortuitous in the long run.

The responsibilities and experiences of both Catholic and Protestant clergymen were similar, even if their initial circumstances differed. In a way, both attempted in 1945 to pick up where they had left off in 1914. The intervening period had been one of wartime restrictions and low numbers of German migrants. In the early post-war years congregations consisted mainly of Germans, or Britons with German ancestors who had settled in Britain before the First World War. This generalisation, however, ignores the fact that along with Jewish refugees, a number of Christians also resettled in England after 1933. In many instances, these migrants made up a significant portion of congregations during wartime. Furthermore, members of the NSDAP could be found amongst the clergy, along with 'non-Aryan' vicars who had been absorbed on the initiative of the Anglican church. These resulted in difficult issues that both churches had to examine and come to terms with after 1945, but which can only be touched upon briefly in this study.

In May 1946, Julius Rieger, vicar at the German Lutheran St George's Church in London's East End, compiled a report on the state of German Protestant churches in Britain.[63] He began with the seven London parishes, although one of which, Islington, had not existed since the First World War. He considered the German Protestant Christ Church in Knightsbridge to be the most important in London. Its buildings had remained intact and services were held there every Sunday. The banker Baron Bruno von Schroeder had built the church in 1904 as a memorial to his late wife. It was erected in one of the smartest parts of London, and replaced the German Hofkapelle (Court Church) that had closed in 1901. Located not far from the German Embassy, it had enjoyed the support of the German Empire, although after 1945, contact with and support from the German diplomatic staff decreased.[64] According to Julius Rieger's report, the congregation consisted mainly of refugees from Nazi Germany. The German Lutheran St George's Church (founded in 1762), in which he served as a vicar, had also held Sunday church services for the duration of the war and continued to do so in the post-war period.

The situation was different in the remaining London parishes. The Hamburg Lutheran Church (Dalston), founded in 1669, had only a very small congregation and the ecclesiastical duties were performed on its behalf by a retired Methodist Minister. The

building housing the German Lutheran St Maria's Church (near Waterloo Bridge) had been completely destroyed. Pastor Hans-Herbert Kramm (at Mansfield College Oxford since 1938) had been appointed vicar of this church in 1943. The German Protestant St Paul's Church (Whitechapel), at which Dietrich Bonhoeffer had worked between 1933 and 1935, had also been completely destroyed.

Outside London, there were two so-called refugee congregations in Birmingham, both with declining memberships. There were congregations in a similar state in Oxford and Cambridge. Church services had still not resumed at the Bradford parish, whose vicar, Wilhelm Hansen, had been interned as a National Socialist from 1940 to 1945.[65] Shortly after 1945 there was a split in the congregation, with older members rejecting their former vicar and post-war migrants from Germany supporting him. According to Rieger, no parish life was possible in Hull at the time because the town had been declared a prohibited area by the military during the war, and thus many active members of the congregation had moved away. A refugee congregation had formed in Leeds in 1941, whilst in Liverpool the pastor was interned between 1940 and 1944, and then repatriated, leaving only the church foreman to hold monthly bible readings. He was also responsible for Manchester, where the church remained closed to its parishioners and also to the refugee congregation that had formed there in 1941. There is very little information in Rieger's report concerning Middlesbrough, Newcastle and South Shields.

The report, submitted only a year after the end of the war, avoids giving reasons for internments or indicating party membership or political agitation on the part of individual pastors. On the other hand, Dietrich Bonhoeffer who worked in London between 1933 and 1935, and who was condemned to death on 20 July 1944, became a symbol for many Protestant Christians of *their* past in Britain. The refugee congregations in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, that is the 'non-Aryan' vicars, were soon almost as forgotten as the clergymen harbouring National Socialist views or the deep divisions and tensions within German congregations when old established members met refugees or post-war migrants. This was partly because, by the end of the war at the latest, refugees from Nazi Germany had either moved again within Britain or to a third country, or even returned to Germany. The post-war migrants, on the other hand, soon outlived the previous generation of German migrants. Also, the clergymen rarely remained in the country for any length of time as they tended to be replaced relatively quickly.[66]

For the Protestant/Lutheran churches, the post-war period was characterised by the creation of a network of parishes that almost covered the entire country. In 1961, there were 16 vicars (in 1999 there were still 7) serving 18 parishes and holding regular church services in German in 50 different towns and cities. In London alone there were 6 parishes, not counting the German YMCA with its 3 houses. There was also a German old peoples' home, a seamen's home and a nursing home and guesthouse. In several towns and cities, Edinburgh for example, parishes that had ceased to exist in 1914 were re-established after 1945.[67]

Social work carried out by the Protestant and Catholic churches, their vicars and active laymen, was very similar in nature. Both felt that it was important to create meeting places and centres that the scattered German population could turn to when coming to town from the countryside, or to the city centre from the suburbs or, in the case of London, to Britain from the continent. Facilities would include childcare whilst parents

shopped, social evenings, women's circles, the (obligatory) Christmas bazaars, carnival celebrations, instruction for communion and confirmations, as well as Sunday schools and, in some places, Saturday schools. In this way, churches of all denominations and nationalities helped the migrants integrate into British society, as did a plethora of other organisations whose activities we have only been able to give the briefest of mentions here.

5
Fifty years on

Return or remain?

During the winter of 1950–51, the German Ministry of Labour asked the British Office of the Manpower Adviser in Wahnerheide for a list of addresses of those women who had been recruited under the North Sea scheme. The reply stated that although the Ministry of Labour in London was in possession of files on foreigners who were employed in Britain, they did not contain actual addresses or details on work placements.[1] This lack of information at such an early stage gives an indication of the general difficulty getting socially and historically relevant data about migrants in post-war Britain. The ministry did not keep a central register, and further, the published information derived from censuses or other statistics raises more questions than it answers. Our efforts to shed light on those who returned home and those who remained are thus largely estimates. We have complemented this with an unusual, if not unique, source: the Alien Register of Salford, held at the Manchester Police Museum.

We can assume that most post-war German migrants remained mobile, moving around within the country or even resettling. As Anthony H.Richmond pointed out, it would have been anachronistic for migrants to 'settle permanently in a particular country or locality'.[2] One of the most important reasons for European migrants in Britain to forego further international migration was their unwillingness, or the sheer impossibility of returning to their country of origin. This was especially the case for many refugees from Nazi Germany, as well as for the majority of the EVWs. If they were to leave Britain at all, then only migration to a third country was possible. According to a study by J.A.Tannahill published in 1958, at the date of publication 25 per cent of the EVWs who had come to Britain immediately after the war had already undertaken just such a step. Most had gone to Canada, and only a third had gone to the USA.[3]

Also, a substantial number of German and ethnic German migrants did not want to return to home countries or regions that were now behind the iron curtain. With the exception of the POWs nearly all were recruited in the western parts of Germany or in Austria, where they had friends or relatives. A return to these areas would have been possible, and was indeed probably planned by most of them. Those who did not return to Germany or who used Britain as a springboard to a third country were usually married. Very few single women chose to stay on in Britain to improve their career prospects. This is also true of the POWs to some extent, as those from the former German eastern territories or from eastern Europe hardly knew West Germany at all.

Exact information about the numbers of returnees only exists for the period up until the end of 1950. By then, 602 EVWs had been deported, and 3,828 had returned voluntarily to the continent. Together, this amounted to approximately 5 per cent of the recruited foreign workforce.[4] A far greater proportion of the North Sea women returned

to Germany, although it has to be considered that the duration of their stay was initially restricted by residency permits of only 2 or 3 years. By the end of 1950, 928 of the 9,713 recruits had left Britain. Amongst the Sudeten Germans, 63 of the 1,304 had left and of the ethnic Germans 10 of the 1,378 had left.[5]

Evidence of the strength of this cross-border movement of people is provided by the census of 1951, which recorded 33,260 male and 63,119 female residents born in Germany (total 96,379). In Scotland the figures were 4,087 (2,197 and 1,890 respectively). The 1951 census allows a further differentiation of the data for England and Wales. Of the 96,379 residents born in Germany 15,439 were recorded as male aliens and 22,281 as female aliens (Table 4). Taking into account the fact that none of the post-war migrants were able to become naturalised Britons at that stage (except some of the war brides), it is evident that even amongst the ex-POWs the level of international migration must have been considerable: some 15,000 POWs remained in the country after 31 December 1948, but in 1951 the total number of male aliens born in Germany, including the non-naturalised refugees from Nazi-Germany, students, academics, business people, etc. was only 15,439. Although here one should also take into consideration the fact that a large number of POWs were born outside the German Reich. The exodus of post-war female German migrants seems even more significant. By 1951, their number was up to 35,000 (excluding war brides), whereas

Table 4 England and Wales. Residents born in Germany by census year

	1951	*1961*	*1971*	*1991*
Male	33,260	40,379	58,935	87,679
Female	63,119	80,572	98,745	127,855
Total	96,379	120,951	157,680	215,534

Source: Census England and Wales, 1951–91.

the census of the same year recorded only 22,448 female aliens born in Germany.

Migrants who considered a temporary return to Germany or migration to a third country are further interesting topics that are equally hard to assess using the official statistics. Amongst those we interviewed, there were a few POWs who had tried to make a living in Canada or in West Germany before coming back to Britain. One woman from the Sudetenland had actually left Britain during the textile crisis of 1952. What brought her back was a letter from a Polish friend in England proposing marriage. Another met her husband on a visit to Germany, lived with him in Germany until he died, and then returned to live in London. It was certainly only a minority of migrants who criss-crossed international borders to this extent. But what most of those who remained in Britain had in common was that they tried out a variety of different jobs and moved quite frequently before they finally bought their first house. Often they had moved around within the same area, with cities and their suburbs proving most attractive in the end. They offered the possibility of better earnings, and the educational opportunities for children were also better. London attracted migrants at all times, but there were also other areas of the country in which they settled and soon felt at home. Decades later, several German post-

war migrants were still living in the same area where they had originally started work. A further factor to be considered is the opportunity for mobility that retirement allows. It was at that point in life, for example, when several exPOWs moved back to the area of Scotland where they had been interned after having spent their working lives in England. One of the key reasons for this was that their wives came from the area of Scotland to which they returned.

A quantitative evaluation of the Alien Register of Salford enabled detailed analysis of the more general, anecdotal information we got from other sources. The registers contain handwritten entries under printed headings, with additional official stamps, typewritten entries and pasted notes. Each entry begins with a running number followed by information on the first place of residence, the individual's Identity Book or Registration Certificate and personal details, such as family name and Christian name, nationality, place and date of birth, gender, address, profession or job and family status. The penultimate column contains the date of arrival in the district, a record of previous addresses, the date of arrival in Britain and the last address in their home country. The entry ends with details of the acquisition of citizenship and relevant residential and labour regulations.

Upon arrival, all foreigners had to register with the local police who would enter their details in the Alien Register and issue a registration certificate. Initially the registration had to be renewed annually, but many of those interviewed for this study reported that it had not been necessary for them to go to the relevant authority. Instead, they were visited by unobtrusively dressed officials who took care of the formalities. A change of residence had to be reported, as did any changes in personal circumstances, marriage for example. Compulsory registration remained in force until 1961, at which point it was lifted for foreigners holding unlimited residency permits.[6]

We analysed two volumes of the Register. They covered the period 1946–54 and contained approximately 700 entries, 300 of which related to people of German nationality or stateless persons born in Germany. Some of the latter were part of the group of 96 refugees from Nazi Germany who moved to Salford in 1946. With the help of the extra information provided by the personal entries and the details concerning residency and work permits, it was possible to divide the remaining 204 registrants into groups. Because the migration of war brides and recruited workers only started in 1947, one can assume that the 11 people who moved to Salford in 1946 were close family members of British citizens and residents or Distressed Persons.[7] In 1947, 6 German academics registered, of whom 2 returned to Germany and the remainder moved within Britain. There was a group comprising 20 women and 3 men for whom residency permits were limited to only a few months. Considering other entries (including naturalisation), it can be assumed that 14 of them were war brides. Furthermore, there were entries for 11 ex-POWs and one member of the Polish Resettlement Corps who was of German nationality. Twenty-nine Germans from the Sudetenland and 9 other women were granted unrestricted residency permits. Two of the women came from Leipzig and were most probably recruited as Sudeten Germans to work in the cotton industry. A further seven were of German nationality, born in eastern or southern European countries, and entered Britain as ethnic Germans under Westward Ho. In addition to the groups already mentioned, between 1948 and 1951, 60 women and 2 men, all possessing a residency permit initially limited to 1 year, moved to Salford. They were also joined by a further 23

women holding residency permits of either 2 or 3 years' duration. The first group consisted mainly of women who had been recruited either privately or through an agency, and the latter were mainly women recruited under the North Sea scheme. The final group comprised the 29 entries during the years 1952–54.

Taken as a whole, the Alien Register reflected great diversity in the types of migration and the possible intentions of the migrants. For the purposes of this study, it also served as a valuable point of reference for the group of interviewees—their regional origins, their marriage and naturalisation patterns as well as their mobility. The entries clearly demonstrate the extent to which women dominated migration during this period. Of the 300 entries, 72 were male and 228 were female. When pre-war refugees are excluded, the imbalance becomes even greater: 29 men and 175 women. Furthermore, the register gives an indication of patterns of geographical mobility. From our group of 300, 48 returned to Germany, 14 migrated to third countries and 6 are merely listed as having 'left UK'. The figure of 68 persons recorded as having left the country should be regarded as the minimum figure, because it is very probable that not all migrants would have told the authorities before they left. Then there were 174 persons who moved to live just outside Salford. Hence, of the 300 migrants, 242 eventually left the district. If we ignore once more the 96 refugees from Nazi Germany, then as many as 173 out of the 204 decided to leave the area that the Alien Register covered (45 returned to Germany, 8 migrated to a third country, 2 'left UK' and 118 moved within the UK). And if we focus exclusively on the recruited workers who migrated to Britain, only 16 of the 173 remained in Salford during the entire period covered by the Alien Register. Of those 173, there were only 48 for whom Salford was the first place they came to in Britain. All the others had already moved at least once, if not several times.

Housing and work

Most recruited women and a large number of ex-POWs returned to Germany during the 1950s. In the long run, only those who were married or who had started a permanent relationship stayed on in Britain. Marriage put an end to ideas of returning to Germany, and also to life in hostels or sharing private rooms. Lack of money meant that for most couples their first home was usually very modest. Only a few were lucky enough to move into a small flat. Most had to make do with a furnished—sometimes barely furnished—bed-sit. Several business-orientated migrants recognised the money to be made from the post-war shortage of accommodation and bought up property with the expressed purpose of renting out rooms. Sometimes they bought jointly with others. These properties usually housed a far higher than average number of tenants. According to Maud Bülbring's study of 1954, each of the 'refugee-owned houses' in Salford, housed an average of 10 people, whereas similar British-occupied houses averaged only 3–4 people.[8]

Of course, the consequence of such a high number of people having to share the same kitchen, toilet and bathroom often meant conflict, which was especially difficult to deal with if there were also babies or small children amongst the occupants. Most interviewees were only prepared to accept such circumstances temporarily. Some applied for newly built council flats, but generally in the early years, such applications stood little chance of success unless the husband was British. To overcome the housing shortage the

government embarked on a campaign of building prefabs as a short-term solution and developing more public sector housing as a long-term strategy. By 1951, this had resulted in about 1.5 million new council houses, compared to only 25,000 privately built houses. At this point about 18 per cent of all British households lived in council-owned flats or houses, which was significantly up on the 12 per cent recorded in 1945.[9] Although anyone could register on council waiting lists and the accommodation was allocated according to a points system, there was always considerable public interest if a foreigner was considered for a much sought after council flat. 'There would be an outcry if Germans got houses before British workers', warned the *Daily Mail* in January 1948.[10] Two years later, two MPs even threatened to resign when it looked as though a council flat in Manchester would be allocated to a German ex-POW and his English wife.[11] Migrants often did not even try to register because they did not understand the application procedure or the allocation system,[12] and sometimes it was not wanting to be viewed as a burden to society that stopped them from applying: 'They would have only said, why do Germans get a house from the council? I decided to save until I had enough money.'[13]

With few exceptions, most of the recruited women wanted to get out of rented accommodation as soon as possible. They wanted to live under their own roof, and most were able to achieve this goal by the mid-1950s. In some parts of Britain, the population as a whole was so mobile that houses were for sale despite the nationwide shortage of accommodation. This was particularly true in those areas of Britain dominated by the textile industry. In contrast, property in other parts of the country remained in short supply for several years.[14] Properties that needed a lot doing to them or that were located in the less desirable areas—the sorts of properties that still constitute transitional areas for new migrants—could often be acquired for a deposit of only £100.

The European migrants' drive to buy property stirred up considerable irritation, envy and conflict within local communities. To put this in context, it is important to point out that at this time only a quarter of all houses were owner occupied, and it was not until 1966 that the figure had increased to 47 per cent.[15] Newspapers researched this delicate issue thoroughly and kept their readers well informed, which seemed to help defuse tensions in some communities. An example of this is an article published in *The Yorkshire Post* in late November 1949. Under the provocative title: 'These foreign workers are a problem', the writer answered the often posed question of how the foreigners had managed to find all the money for such a large acquisition in such a short period of time. The answer was, through 'work, thrift and frugal living'.[16] Similar articles were published during 1949 and 1951 in many local or regional newspapers. They always pointed to the extreme thrift and industriousness of the foreign workers.[17]

Many European workers attached a significance to owning property that a local purchaser would not have felt. For the migrants owning their own home represented material safety, was a visible expression of success and an indication of the degree to which they had settled in. It was often also the result of working a lot of overtime, holding down second or third jobs, lots of DIY and usually achieved with the help of a network of friends. Getting together the deposit frequently involved two (sometimes more) migrants pooling savings, and properties purchased in this way usually had all rooms rented out to secure more capital for the next investment.

To avoid over-committing themselves, most couples started out very modestly. A two-up, two-down Victorian terrace, with an outside toilet, and furnished with second-hand

furniture would have been common.[18] Sometimes they moved on to larger and more comfortable houses, which apparently got bigger as the migrants' economic success increased.[19] The material achievement represented by property was a source of pride that lasted for decades, and seemed to be particularly significant for those Germans who married eastern European men and started with nothing. The obstacles they had had to overcome were enormous. For example, finding British guarantors who were able to offer security for a mortgage at a time when they hardly knew any English people at all, and those that they did know usually did not have enough money themselves to stand surety for them. This meant there was usually no alternative to working overtime to save up the required deposit. Occasionally there might be an authority figure who could help, a German vicar who knew the local bank manager, for example, but these instances were exceptions rather than the rule.[20] All those interviewed for this study were proud to have managed without much help from others: 'Everything in the house had to be done, but we were lucky we did not have to go through the bank, we were able to pay for it directly.'[21]

Financially, war brides had it much easier than the recruited women, of course, and this was particularly so when they were able to stay with their husband's family for months or even years after they first arrived. But even if the initial reception had been friendly, in the long run, sharing a roof and limited space with so many other family members was rarely easy. The lack of privacy and poor facilities (houses without a bathroom or inside toilet were not uncommon) took their toll on relationships and created tension. 'We lived in the in-laws' house for three years. […] We had a put-you-up that was our bed. At night it was our bed, during the day we folded it up. There was a little cradle in the corner and a table and chairs in the bay window, behind the curtain was a small sideboard and that was it. And there we lived, slept, wrote, played, everything was done in that room.'[22]

War brides also found it much easier to get into council accommodation than other migrants, but this did not always result in much improvement in their domestic situations: 'The flat as such was all right, but it was cold with the wind going through. […] And the neighbours […], they fought so much, we could hear every word.'[23] Given the power landlords had as a result of the housing shortage, it is not surprising that some took their own approach to resolving a lack of domestic help and asked for payment in kind—housework or childcare, for example—rather than rent: 'I cooked for him, I made his room up and cleaned. […] Sometimes he was a bit strange, but as I said, the first five years were not easy.'[24]

It was noticeable that owning one's home was not as important to German-British couples as it was to German-eastern European couples, nor did the former pursue it so single-mindedly. It seems that this had something to do with the influence of the British partner. Generally, these families' lives did not focus solely on saving, work and overtime. Traditional English working class values, which included enjoying leisure time and did not necessarily place much importance on home ownership, were more likely to influence lifestyles.

Those in rural Scotland faced a housing shortage even more severe than in the south, and very modest, if not poor, living standards. Former POWs who stayed on farms often had to wait a long time before being granted a cottage by their employers. Accommodation was tied to work and regarded as part of the wage. Changing jobs meant losing your accommodation, which explains why some workers stayed in the agricultural

sector for decades. Cottage accommodation seems to have been very similar in terms of size, style and facilities. What might seem romantic today—no electricity, cooking on an open fireplace and drawing water from the well—was then simply regarded as a very basic standard of living. But in comparison to their city counterparts, the cottagers at least had the free run of the whole house and surrounding land.

'Normally these houses have a room to the left and to the right of the front door, on one side is the kitchen and on the other, the living room', is how Mizzi described the cottage in which she and her husband lived for ten years: 'Upstairs there were two bedrooms with a window, slanting walls with sash windows which you had to pull up and down to open or close […] and in every room an open fireplace. There was no other heating in those days. You had to light the fire in the bedroom, in the living room, you had to light the fire in the kitchen if you wanted boiling water for breakfast in the morning. […] Everything was done on the open fireplace. We had an open fireplace on which we were able to cook. We did everything on it, boiling the laundry and baking. There was a small sort of tube next to the fire and we used that for baking. It didn't always work, because the side where the fire was became hotter than the other side, so that sometimes one side of the cake was black, whereas the other side was not yet baked. Oh well, and in the first few years we had no electricity. We had oil lamps and they were unusual for me because I had never seen those in Germany, where we had electricity. Yes, and what a lamp. […] They are called Tilly lamps here, you have to pump, so that the air gets into the oil, and then there is a mantle on top which glows. […] In order to wash ourselves we had a tin tub, a big bowl, which was carried in and put in front of the fireplace, and then we washed ourselves there in the kitchen.'[25]

Wages in the agricultural sector were poor, and with many basic necessities still being rationed, many rural families had to manage on a very tight budget. However, supplementing the housekeeping was much easier in the country than the city: 'Fishing, shooting, and we also had a few chickens and ducks and a vegetable garden and we picked berries. My husband shot pigeons, my mum sent me marjoram so we made pigeon pate. I cut the turnips, cooked and battered them. […] We also had a lot of potatoes and my husband grew mushrooms. We sold green beans. We tried about everything. […] We also started baking our own bread and making our own Sauerkraut, we marinated our herrings—just like the east Europeans do. […] We had no money, we were poor buggers, yes, we had to slave away.'[26]

Living to work

The financial burden of buying a home forced families to keep their outgoings low and their incomes as high as possible. Families where both husband and wife worked and saved hard and spent little were the norm. Few migrant families could afford the wife to be a mother and housewife only. Contributing to the household income meant most women returned to work soon after giving birth, and their husbands often pressured them to do so. This was possible because many factories had their own crèches: 'The baby was seven or eight weeks old when I went back to work. […] Back to the cotton mill which also had a nursery. […] That's where my boy grew up, as it were.'[27] Others shared childcare with a friend, or organised a neighbourhood network so they could carry on working. For many, these self-help groups were a necessity until the children started

school, and they also looked after older children during the holidays and periods of illness. Most women did not want to work full time, but felt obliged due to the financial commitment they had taken on. Many went on to a second job, cleaning or serving in a hospital canteen, 'anything you could get',[28] when they finished in the factory. Looking back, most remembered a fairly grim existence dominated by work and caring for their family, one in which leisure and fun hardly featured: 'It was work, work and work again. […] There was no happiness.'[29]

This was less so for those who married British men. Most husbands, particularly working class men, did not expect their wives to work full time unless it was absolutely necessary. So for German-British couples, it was much more common for women to give up their jobs when children were born: 'Unfortunately he wanted me to be a house-mummy.'[30]

But in contrast to all social expectations there were also marriages in which the wife became the sole breadwinner, as in the case of Margarete who came to Britain in 1950. She worked in the mills until 1952 when the cotton crisis hit, and then trained as a nurse, but gave this up after her marriage to care for her family. In 1967, her husband became ill and had to discontinue his business. The family fell into debt and there were five young children to look after. Stepping in to the breach, Margarete went out to work to keep the family fed. Later she trained as a teacher and continued working to support all her children through university. Even after she had retired officially she was still working as a freelance language teacher.

A different pattern for ex-POWs emerged during our interviews. Many of these men were very young when they first joined the Wehrmacht or *SS*. Most of them had little work experience or had had their vocational training interrupted by going off to fight. Those who did not marry a British woman usually carried on working in the agricultural sector for at least four years after their release. Many of them stayed in the sector permanently, either because they liked the work or because they just got used to it. Those who did not want to stay in agriculture had little choice but to take on other dirty or physically demanding jobs avoided by the locals.

Although nearly all the men we interviewed found the relationship with their bosses difficult, rejections by work colleagues were less common. Most said that they got on relatively well with their colleagues. Apart from some 'obligatory' remarks such as 'bloody foreigner', arguments or bullying were rare. The phrase 'nobody gave me a hard time' was frequently used. Furthermore, some of the interviewees, Arthur for example, gave the impression that staff problems a company might face through employing a German were often solved by including a less favourable redundancy clause in their employment contract. The company that Arthur, a qualified tool-maker, was working for introduced temporary short work in the mid-1950s, prompting much discussion of redundancy and insecurity amongst the staff: 'Meanwhile I worked in the department that accepted deliveries to the factory, that is the control department. And there was a lot of envy amongst several colleagues, because I earned a few pennies more than them. And then the boss tried to hide behind the trade union and said: "Foreigners have to go first." […] They protected their own people with the help of the trade unions. I was the only foreigner and thus I had to go.'[31]

It was rare for this sort of setback to dent a POWs work ethic. A strong commitment to work and an eagerness to achieve came through in all we interviewed. The men felt

responsible for bringing in the income that would create a stable environment for their families. They also wanted to be accepted by the locals, and being seen as an industrious or 'good' foreigner was also often linked to achieving material goals. The Germans' zeal for work often contrasted with the approach taken by their British colleagues, and over time the idea of the 'industrious German' versus the 'lazy Brit' became embedded in the public imagination. The extent to which these stereotypes took hold is illustrated by the fact that they even appeared in reports on post-war Germany made by British journalists: 'No man ought to love the work as they do—it's indecent, certainly uncivilised. We English don't love work in this slave-like way, and thank god for it.'[32]

The majority of ex-POWs defined themselves through their work. For some, success at work and the material rewards this brought was their sole measure of personal success. For these men, a sense of their own superiority accompanied by a tendency to undervalue others became firmly entrenched: 'If you want to work, then here in England nobody will take the work away from you.'[33] Despite their willingness to work hard, however, most found it took much longer than expected to really feel part of the workforce. Many experienced long periods, for some it was their entire working lives, characterised by job insecurity and frequent changes of employer. Because so many of the jobs open to them, either in factories or in a trade, turned out to be unsatisfying, some of the ex-POWs became self-employed. They turned their hand to small service-oriented or trading businesses: a corner shop, a small cafe, cleaning, building or hairdressing, for example. Others worked their way up the ladder in factories or offices. One built bridges, several ran farms or hotels and over the years some became modestly affluent, but only a few became rich. At the time of our interviews most owned their own homes and cars, and could get by comfortably on their pension. Some questioned their decision to stay in Britain: 'In Germany I would have achieved much more.'[34]

Language and career

For women professional success was often linked to English language competency, and in this respect some were far better prepared than others. Some had learned basic English at school in Germany, others had been able to pick up some English through work or friendships with British soldiers in Germany. Once in Britain, if they were surrounded by English speakers they quickly extended and consolidated their language skills. Those who initially arrived with only a few words often preferred to shop at supermarkets to avoid the embarrassment of resorting to sign language to overcome misunderstandings: 'I stood in front of the shop and hardly dared to go in. I knew what I wanted but I did not know how to pronounce it. Initially we were confronted with so many small problems I went into a shop and asked for "soap" but got "soup".'[35]

Some women managed to obtain positions of significant responsibility due to their language abilities. One of them, Isedore, found work and promotion with the London Press Exchange,[36] and Mechthild, who had previous experience in the German steel industry was similarly fortunate: 'I saw a post advertised in the *Evening Standard:* "Steel exporter is looking for secretary with German language knowledge", and when I phoned them, they spoke German. The company was Czech with German staff. […] I got £12. […] The average salary was roughly £6, my salary was much more than my husband

earned and my mother-in-law almost fell off her chair [when she heard it]. I always had a good salary.'[37]

Women recruited for nursing training usually started with a relatively good standard of English as they had to be able to follow their specialised classes in English and had to deal with patients from the outset. Their language competence together with the high regard in which nurses were held made it possible for them to find partners from other social spheres. They were thus spared many of the negative experiences encountered by countrywomen who spoke hardly any English when they arrived and went to work as domestics or into the textile industry. 'In the beginning I did not speak any English. We did not have any opportunity for that. One did the work and did not talk. [And after work] we were amongst ourselves. That's how it was. In two years I did not learn anything, it was still a foreign land.'[38]

Women who married eastern European men were generally quite slow to expand their language skills. They were part of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment. The Memel-German/Lithuanian couple, Eleonore and Viktor, is a case in point. Both started work in a textile factory, and it was there that they met. For the first five years of their marriage they only spoke German to each other. This began to change once their first child started school: 'Now after 50 years my English has become a bit better. […] In former years we read German books and journals every week, we read a lot. And the German vicar brought me *Kicker.* Now I also read English and I receive a Lithuanian newspaper, so I know what is going on at home. Most of us never went to school or never had any classes in English. […] The pronunciation does not come out correctly, the accent is different, it is Pidgin English.'[39] Like many eastern Europeans, the standard of their English effectively barred them from going into a profession and limited their working lives in other ways.

But of course there are always exceptions. Gretel, a Sudeten German married to a Ukrainian, was determined to overcome her language limitations: 'Language classes? no, not at all. There [in Oldham] we had to look out for ourselves, how best to get by. I always went around with a dictionary in my hand, and turned to those who knew a little English. This usually worked. And then there was a night school in Blackburn "English for Foreigners". […] Later on, when I worked in a hospital, I already knew a little English. I always found it painful to pass by the National College when I came into town with my little daughter, Irene. It always hurt me that I did not have a proper education.' Eventually she took night classes to catch up on her missing education. This helped her get a job as a secretary in a small firm that was later taken over by a German multinational: 'At the beginning I was in the Sales Department and then the first Germans arrived, the Financial Director and the Manager, and I became their PA. […] I worked for the directors until my retirement.' Gretel's rise from textile worker to PA, via several jobs and hours at night school, was testimony to her motivation and enormous perseverance, which is even more remarkable since her husband did not support her effort. When interviewed Gretel was insistent: 'You have to do it yourself.'[40]

Marriage and family

Apart from work and the struggle for financial security, family was the mainstay for German migrants in Britain. However, we noticed gender differences when interviewees talked about their partners. Some of the ex-POWs indicated that their wives had taken responsibility for all external contacts the family had, communication with government and local authorities, schools, estate agents, etc. and that they had not minded this at all. This could have been due to insecurity, fear of authority, a lack of confidence or simply because problems were more easily resolved when their British wife dealt with them. The somewhat one-sided accounts given by the ex-POWs led us to concentrate our analysis (and portrayal) on the experiences of women who married British or eastern European men. Examining their life stories allowed us to explore questions of acceptance and adaptation, supposed domestic virtues, and what they expected of and for their children.

Roles

It was striking that only two of the Sudeten German women who married eastern European men talked about their husbands and their married life positively. All the others referred to marital problems, which they explained in terms of differences in 'mentality' and role expectations. It seems that they expected partnership and sharing in their marriages, but instead found that their husbands insisted on playing the dominant role in all important areas of their lives, particularly in financial matters. Added to this was the expectation that they had to go out to work to contribute to the family income, irrespective of pregnancies or small children, or the fact that they were also responsible for running the household and bringing up the children.

These women made it very clear that to avoid arguments they had to do as their husbands wanted, who were often described as very simple people, relatively uneducated and rough, sometimes out of control and occasionally violent. However, they always mentioned, with some degree of pride, that they were also very ambitious, jealous and hard working: 'The Ukrainians, they were always diligent, they worked and worked. […] We achieved much more than those who were married to English men.'[41] It seemed that their husbands were not at all interested in the domestic aspects of family life, but instead were oriented towards the male companionship they found at their ethnic clubs: 'The Ukrainians loved to go out and so did he, and when he didn't work he went to the club. If there was any opportunity to go to the club, then he took it.'[42] There was an undercurrent of sadness to these accounts, unhappiness about the separateness of so much of their lives and a deeply felt loneliness that sometimes bordered on feelings of marginalisation: 'He always brought home Poles. Our home was like a hostel, always Poles around, always strangers, strange Poles. And only Polish was spoken. If I asked "Why do you laugh or what did you say?", he answered "Why don't you learn Polish?"'[43]

Most women felt that they had, at least partially, accommodated their husbands' lifestyles and expectations, changing the way they cooked and learning how to prepare their traditional national dishes, for example. Some learned how to read and write in Ukrainian or Polish. Ilona, a Sudeten German, was typical in this respect. Her story was one of almost total subservience to her husband, and she seemed almost relieved to have the chance the interview gave her to talk about it. She was recruited in 1949 to work in

the cotton mills, and just seven months after arriving in Britain and aged 23, she married a 41-year old Ukrainian. She stressed that she went into the marriage not for love, but rather, very pragmatically in the hope of finding a better life: 'They all got married, so I thought I should get married too. I met him on the dance floor. He was a good dancer. He was nice to me and he had a small house, not too big but cosy. […] I always went to see him, not for love but for the good soup. He made a good soup and I was always hungry.' For her, marriage to an older man seemed to offer stability and security, but it soon became apparent that this was not the case. Instead, total obedience was demanded of her: 'I had to be quiet and listen to him.'

It was not only women who married to eastern European men who talked about unhappy marriages. Women with British husbands also had bad experiences, particularly the war brides who had come to Britain unprepared and ignorant of their new social environment. They recalled their frustration when they realised that life in Britain was not going to live up to their expectations, and that their husbands would not be able to offer them what they had hoped for. It was only then that some realised just how different the social environment they would have to live in was to what they were used to. Those for whom social status was important and who experienced a significant drop on coming to Britain found it hard to adjust. 'I came from a very different family compared to my husband', reported Paula, the daughter of a well-to-do family of piano builders and traders whose childhood and youth had been influenced by classical music and ballet dancing: 'His main interest was sport, dog and horse racing.' With hindsight she felt she had been too young, too ignorant and confused by the circumstances of the time. She wished she had given herself more time to get to know her boyfriend, and to have learned to speak English better before committing herself: 'Our circumstances after the war were not normal, everything was up-side-down.'[44]

The then 18-year-old Elvira from Berlin was also taken aback by the social conditions her young husband introduced her to. This very sheltered, only daughter stopped training as a nurse to go to Britain. But she then found herself in 'deeply primitive conditions' in a run-down part of London. All her new husband's family were unemployed and unmotivated, living in one flat with an outdoor toilet and no running water. But what disappointed her most was finding out that her husband was illiterate: 'I received letters apparently from him, but they were written by others. He was unable to read or write. That's why he was so insecure and couldn't hold a job. My baby was three days old before he came to the hospital to visit me, this was because he couldn't read the directions.'[45] Like Elvira, several other women blamed themselves for being too inexperienced and too easily impressed by the men's courting to think about their future life in Britain clearly. They had just assumed that their situation would improve over time. Their knowledge of English had initially been too poor for them to have had any real conversations with their boyfriends about their future lives. 'Anyway, we thought they were all lords here.'[46]

Many women married into the working class, which at that stage was much more rigid in terms of cultural values and the way it saw itself than the German working class. Some German brides not only bemoaned their drop in social status but also their husband's satisfaction with that very same social standing. These men showed none of the signs of individual ambition to better themselves or to 'make it', and many ambitious German women obviously found it difficult to reconcile such passive attitudes with their own

hopes and dreams. Interestingly, several of those who talked about unhappy marriages portrayed their husbands as the active party in pursuing the marriage, thus tending to ignore their own motives, which at the time were often dominated by a strong desire to leave Germany. It was this retrospective one-sidedness that was behind comments such as: 'He insisted, and then we got engaged',[47] and: 'He was so persistent that I thought it must be love.'[48]

But such disappointment was not the cornerstone of all marriages. We also heard from happy brides and marriages, including Hermine: 'We rented a very nice flat [in London]. I carried on working, but was always free on weekends. It was very nice, very comfortable. We had little money, my God, how little money we had. I didn't have a washing machine. I had a boiler and even made my own Sauerkraut. We had a very good time. We also had nice friends and each weekend we either went to the Royal Festival Hall or to the National Theatre or to the cinema. It was lovely.' Hermine was recruited in 1949 under the North Sea scheme to work in a hospital. She still remembered why she was drawn to her future husband. After some turbulent years, which included escaping from Danzig, forced labour in Poland and then migrating to Britain, she was looking for security. Her British husband offered this. He was also intelligent and reliable, traits she appreciated, and he was interested in 'everything German'.[49]

Irrespective of how they judged their marriage, all the interviewees described their role within the family in similar ways. With very few exceptions, they all stressed that they had been 'very good housewives'. They also viewed it as a personal triumph that their practical skills and ability to economise had enabled them to survive those financially difficult years and successfully bring up their children. Some of the skills they needed for those early years in Britain, living frugally and being able to save, for example, they had developed during the war. Many had also consciously become the traditional model of the good Hausfrau. This was an ideal that was further promoted during the Nazi period, and emphasised being orderly, clean, frugal and good with money.

They took pride in being able to grow their own fruits and vegetables, sew and knit for their children, and turn their hand to DIY. Many mentioned their talent for domestic organisation, and often made a distinction between themselves and British households where 'a lot of things are wasted'.[50]

In this context, many also made use of and valued those supposed symbols of German culture, such as a young women's traditional dowry of bed and table linen, fine bone china crockery or silver cutlery: 'It was unknown here in Britain for a girl to get a dowry. […] They were green with envy when they saw it. […] And our way of cooking, they couldn't compare with us. And we brought cleanliness, real cleanliness and culture to this area.'[51] So for some there was a strong desire to differentiate and distance themselves from their neighbours, and a feeling of superiority that seemed to be the outcome of how a whole generation of women had been socialised. However, these women were the exception rather than the rule.

Children

Children played a particularly important role in the lives of the German women. They were often the only people they could talk to in their mother tongue. Some children spoke

only German up until the age of 4 or 5 when they started school, and English quickly became the language the children spoke amongst themselves. The linguistic mix for families was also influenced by close relatives arriving from Germany. Several widows joined their daughters in Britain. Since most of them could not speak English, the grandchildren were more or less forced to speak German. Even if a grandmother had only stayed for a limited time, their visit seemed to have a significant effect on the children's motivation: 'They wanted to learn German to speak with their Omi, not with me.'[52] According to the interviewees, nearly all their children learned German to some extent. Their childhood fluency sometimes faded as they went through school, or in some cases remained and was even used professionally later on.

In families with eastern European fathers, the children often had to learn their language as well. In many areas of Britain, this was made possible by Saturday or Sunday schools that taught religion and culture. Tri-lingual families were not the exception: 'Well, table language was German because my mother came here when my daughter just started school. My mother stayed in my house for 13 years and then she died; thank God she was here, we talked German. My husband spoke Polish with his friends in the house and my children learned Polish as well, as they went to Sunday school.'[53]

Mothers did not only dominate home and child rearing, including the extent to which children learnt German, they also invested a lot of energy ensuring that their children fulfilled the expectations they had for them at school. But this was not only a German characteristic. It seems, rather, to have been a common trait of most European migrant mothers. How their children performed at school, their efforts to support them and their husbands' indifference in this respect, were topics that featured heavily in all our interviews, as did describing their pride and joy when their children 'did really well at school'.[54] These women did not identify with traditional British working class values regarding education in any way. In this respect they certainly remained ambitious continental Europeans, whose biggest wish was to see each of their children do well in both professional and social terms. Often, these high expectations came from wanting the next generation to make up for their own missed or interrupted education. And in fact most children, if they were able to cope with the enormous pressure put on them, were more successful in society's terms than their parents. The majority went on to get a university degree, which made them part of a relatively small professional group at that time in Britain. Photographs of graduation ceremonies decorated the mantelpieces of many parental living rooms.

Resentment, conflict and adaptation

The academic literature does not give a consistent picture of the British population's attitude and opinions towards the European workers, but there is consensus that there were no known cases of collective violence against the migrants. It is important to stress this fact, in view of the violent incidents involving several migrant groups in different hostels,[55] as well as the anti-Semitic riots in August 1947[56] and the more widely known Liverpool riots of 1948.[57] If collective violence between locals and migrants cannot therefore be automatically excluded, the question arises as to why it did not occur against the Europeans?

Possible reasons, such as strong similarities in culture and appearance, skin colour in particular, do not explain the violence against Jews. In this context one should also consider that, according to Michael le Lohe's study on Bradford, the EVWs 'rarely spoke English and second they were distinguished by their "Slavic" appearance, haircuts and dress. Third, they were competing in the housing market and some of our "lads" who had fought with "Monty still had no roof of their own".'[58] A definitive explanation is also difficult because a variety of attitudes to foreigners could be expressed by the same strata of British society. These attitudes were usually very localised. Sometimes they extended across a region, but never the whole country, and never did they condone collective violence.

All previous attempts so far to generalise about the attitudes that led to violence have not been convincing because the assumptions they are based on are not well founded. Also, there was a section of the local population that was socially helpful and actively involved in helping them, although the majority remained indifferent and hardly noticed the migrants. 'The reaction throughout the country, as far as can be ascertained is practically nil', declared a member of staff from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, in February 1948: 'From enquiries made in the Borders, South, West, Central Scotland and also the North, it appears that the public are completely apathetic towards these people.'[59] J.A.Tannahill drew a similar conclusion in 1958. Referring to the traditional reserve of the British, he noted the 'customary lack of effusion' with which locals greeted the European workers. And he concluded that although there was indeed both opposition and indifference, the general attitude was one of tolerance.[60]

Writing at the end of the 1980s, Colin Holmes rejected the assumption that there was universal tolerance. He did point out that little was known about the contemporary image of the European migrant or the construction of this image.[61] Over 50 years on, it is impossible to close this gap, particularly given the deficiencies of the surviving sources. The situation is further obscured by the fact that the image of European migrants has become somewhat idealised as a result of, and when compared with the migrants from the Commonwealth who arrived later.[62] As a consequence, the barriers that initially existed between the British and the EVWs, that is to say, between 'us' and 'them' or 'them' and 'us', became more permeable. And in an odd twist, the later migrants from the Commonwealth had to contend with a greater level of hostility. Interestingly, even their European predecessors contributed to this, as they now no longer felt themselves to be at the bottom of society but rather part of the new 'us', as opposed to the newcomers who were the new 'them'.[63]

Them Poles

The British government's decision to recruit European workers in the post-war years was, in effect, a decision to discourage the immigration of non-white British subjects from its dominions and colonies. During the discussions surrounding the Polish Resettlement Act, it became clear that an agreement on this immigration and recruitment policy would only be possible with the approval of the trade unions. Initially they were very sceptical. The reservations of individual union officials seemed to reflect the opinions of different sectors of the British public. In his 1956 study, Jerzy Zubrzycki identified deep rooted

social problems, including the shortage of housing and hostility from the local population, as the main reasons for the high rates of alcoholism, criminality, mental illness and suicide amongst the Polish migrants.[64] Following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, these former Polish heroes of the Battle of Britain found themselves pushed into the shadow of the new Soviet allies, for whom they did not have much love.[65] After the war, they and their families became the targets of hostile attacks for which newspapers including the *Daily Mirror,* the *Evening Standard* and the *News Chronicle* were partially responsible for inciting.[66]

The humiliation, attacks and rejections they suffered often stayed with them for the rest of their lives.[67] 'During the war we were all friends with them' a Pole from Huddersfield stated, 'but after the war there were already some people in Scotland, most of them politically motivated, who used to…were hostile towards us.'[68] Another recalled being badly treated by the locals, and being barred from a local pub.[69] 'Pole' was one of the most frequently used insults applied to all foreign workers at the time. 'In those days every foreigner was classed as a Pole. Whether he was Ukrainian, or Yugoslavian, or German or anybody, he was a Pole! That's the way it was.'[70] This often produced forms of segregation or avoidance,[71] even to the extent of local families moving away when a Pole bought the house next door: 'They were trying to bloody leave the street straight away, you see, like you were frightened buying a house next to a bloody Pakistani.'[72] This remark also indicates how the migrants came to see themselves as 'us' and became the discriminator (as opposed to the discriminated against) when the later waves of migration from the Commonwealth took place.

The European workers were definitely not welcomed everywhere, but the extent of discrimination, hostility, attacks and teasing cannot be correlated with particular regions or cities, or the further north or south they went. Even areas that traditionally prided themselves on their hospitality could be intolerant. In June 1948, the city council of Perth had a heated debate about the use of Fenchney Hostels as accommodation for 880 foreign workers who were going to be employed in the local textile and building industries. The debate, which centred on the basic conflict of interest between the necessity of 'national exports' and the size of the local housing shortage,[73] provoked many letters to the editor that were clearly antagonistic towards them.[74] Finally, a group of 80 EVW women were housed there. A year later, they again became the target of local resentment. The occasion was their move into a newly refurbished former military camp near Scone. This prompted some local residents to present a petition signed by 113 people to the County Council.[75]

Another indication of this hostility can be found in a 1949 report in an Oldham newspaper which criticised the attitude taken by the local population towards the DPs: 'When the mysterious letters are whispered, we turn in the street, furtively, as if these people were some kind of new parish to be tolerated, not human-beings who have lost their countries, their families and almost lost themselves.'[76] About two years later the 'so-called Lancashire hospitality' was called into question after an Austrian female worker committed suicide. Residents were apparently proud of their reputation for hospitality, but readers were asked, 'how many of us ever give a kind word to one of these people?'[77]

As with Oldham and other cities and regions in Britain, kindness and hostility probably also co-existed in Bradford. The image of Bradford as a 'good town' for foreigners was based on a period during the Second World War when locals had invited several hundred Polish soldiers as part of a 'hospitality scheme'.[78] According to Maud

Bülbring writing in 1954, this prompted more Polish workers to settle in Bradford.[79] Sigrid Baringhorst presented similar arguments in a more recent study. She saw British hostility being more focussed on Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants.[80] However this is contradicted by some of the British textile workers interviewed as part of the Oral History Project, *Bradford's Textile Community,* who spoke of a widespread rejection of and hostility towards European migrants: 'Some of the people, you know, probably wouldn't look to the side they were on.'[81] Similar memories were recalled by the recipients when talking about a difficult beginning, the unfriendly atmosphere and harsh treatment, or even being victims of a 'strong anti-foreigner feeling'.[82]

This tension was reflected in contemporary media reports, which also tried to defuse the tension. There were numerous articles that dealt with Europe's DPs and the fact that Britain was short of labour. Newspapers kept their readers informed about official government policy on migration. They also played a part in helping find accommodation, raising awareness of social problems and contributing to the acceptance of foreign workers in general and thus helping bridge the gap between newcomers and hosts. Later on, articles were published in which the work performance of the European workers was praised, or the speed with which their initial problems had been overcome was also referred to.[83] On the other hand, they also reported in detail when EVWs appeared in court due to heavy drinking, violence, vandalism or some other criminal act,[84] or when women were afraid to walk near a DP camp after dark,[85] or instances such as when farmers complained about the behaviour of workers in Full Sutton Camp and the surrounding area.[86]

Newspaper portrayals of EVWs employed in agriculture were often negative. The main reason for this seems to have been mismatched expectations. Farms needing workers in the post-war years were those where the living and working conditions were particularly harsh and that had previously been able to satisfy their demand for workers with POWs. But many of the recruits did not want to work in a sector involving physically strenuous work that was not particularly well paid. In July 1948, the first of a three-part series of articles appeared in the *Daily Mirror* that openly stirred up resentment towards the EVWs. According to this, a third of all labourers recruited for agricultural work were not actually working in the sector, many did not want to learn English, and yet they were receiving double the ration of food a British agricultural worker could expect. Wages were supposedly so generous that by working for four or five days they earned so much they would take the following week off.[87] It is likely that the *Daily Mirror* was reflecting a more widespread annoyance felt by the public. Scottish farmers, for example, had expressed strong dissatisfaction with the performance of Poles and EVWs, and had even demanded their deportation.[88] The reputable *Yorkshire Post* wrote at the end of 1948: 'Sympathetic as one feels towards DPs as an unfortunate class, it must be recorded that the experience of the farming community with regard to the EVW labour has not been altogether a happy one. […] Many farmers feel that the repatriation of so many prisoners of war, who were admirable workers, and their replacement with Eastern European Volunteers has been a serious political error.'[89]

Bloody Nazis

In the early post-war years, the media often depicted German POWs in a very positive light, but the insult that titles this section was often applied to other German migrants. Most of the interviewees talked about the hostility they had experienced. Popular perception equated all Germans with Nazis for a long time, and this was reinforced by sections of the press, radio and TV, and by films shown at the cinema.[90] Only a few of our interviewees claimed to have never personally been on the receiving end of hostility. Without exception they had lived in small rural communities, where 'everyone knows each other' and where they felt included.[91]

The majority of Germans appear to have had a different experience. Most talked of hostile incidents that occurred within a few years of their arrival in Britain. Some described clearly targeted actions and violent threats, others the subtle but hostile attitudes they had been exposed to. An example of the latter was Elvira, who was terrorised by her obviously psychopathic neighbour for six years before the police and the council took action and she was allocated a different flat: 'He shouted at me, that we had started the last two wars and he wanted to start the next war with me and said "I'll finish you".'[92] Lena also described feeling seriously threatened by a phone call: 'I was all by myself when a male voice said: Tonight you will be killed. At first I only laughed […] and thought someone wanted to tease me […], but no, that wasn't the case. He repeated himself several times until I put the phone down and called the police. […] A few weeks later he called again and said it was not meant against me personally but he was generally against us Germans. I became very frightened, but that is what those days were like.'[93] Several interviewees had their front doors, walls or other parts of their property anonymously daubed with swastikas, which was obviously seen as a provocation, and they felt humiliated and deeply hurt by these actions.

In public, Germans were mainly recognised by their accent or by speaking German. This often provoked negative reactions, 'when we Germans went by we always got it because we spoke German',[94] or led to open discrimination: 'I can remember I went to a pub together with a German, and we spoke German. Then we were told, "We don't serve foreigners here".'[95] German migrants experienced this kind of hostility not only from locals but also from other migrants. Even in the multilingual communities of the cotton industry a certain degree of caution was apparently necessary: 'If you entered a bus you would hear lots of different foreign languages: Italian, Ukrainian and Polish. Everyone was very loud on the bus, but the Germans were different, we were not allowed to speak German.'[96] Alongside the various open expressions of hostility the interviewees also remembered more subtle forms, which they attributed to their nationality rather than them personally: 'I started to attend the English church—some members of the congregation would not sit next to me. They squeezed together on a different bench, but wouldn't sit where it was vacant.'[97] Others could not recall any concrete examples when they had felt rejected, but spoke of a general underlying feeling: 'There was simply a wall.'[98]

The question of whether anti-German feelings were predominantly found amongst the older or the younger generation produced a variety of answers. Some interviewees were convinced that they had experienced it mainly from the older generation, and particularly from those who had lost relatives in one or both wars. Some could sympathise with this attitude, and even said that they felt guilty when they saw British war invalids. Others felt this was completely unjust, and distanced themselves from any responsibility. These

sometimes tense meetings with British war invalids were an everyday occurrence for many who married an ex-British serviceman. 'My husband and I met several of his former comrades, officers in a pub. And an older man with only one arm came towards me and said "That's what your father has done", and my husband's comrade said "How do you know, he wasn't it at all. What's this girl got to do with it?" That's how it went. I often felt that Germans were generally hated.'[99] In contrast, some interviewees felt that there was more understanding for Germans in their situation amongst the older generation. They saw the younger generation as being much more anti-German. One recounted young people marching through a German-rented cafe giving a Hitler salute, and painting swastikas on the pavement.[100]

Hostility and stereotyping was not limited to German migrants. Often it was also aimed at their British partners: 'I noticed it a lot, a lot. You know, I went for an interview for a job and they'd ask you about the name, what was it, what nationality? As soon as you said German, that was it. You wouldn't get the job, no way. No matter how much experience you had.'[101] Anti-German resentment was not confined to the early post-war years, when the memories of war, economic hardship and German war crimes were still fresh in people's minds. The Germans we interviewed claimed to have been the target of hostilities for most of their lives, although to different degrees. They spoke of a decrease in the intensity of the antagonism, but were unable to pinpoint when it occurred. 'The hatred of Germans stopped a long time ago, at least 15 years ago', was the sort of comment we heard indicating the atmosphere had improved.[102] But it also illustrates how persistent the negative images were. These were kept alive by periodic attacks against Germans by parts of the British media, which many found deeply hurtful and upsetting. In contrast, others pointed out that the decrease in hostility they experienced was a consequence of new waves of migration from the Commonwealth, and that the new groups quickly became the main focus of hostility: 'Now we are forgotten, now its the Pakistanis they don't like.'[103]

Individuals developed different ways of dealing with the resentment. Some regarded it as an exception rather than something widespread in British society. They saw the behaviour as being confined to specific groups: the young or the old, the uneducated or the mentally ill. Such a view obviously helped them to rationalise unpleasant situations and to deal with them. Others tried to minimise or make light of them: 'I think these are minor things, they always happen.'[104] 'How well you get on with others, is down to your own behaviour.'[105] 'If they show an old film in TV, well we've got used to it now.'[106] Finally, a third group felt very concerned and became emotionally upset by the hostility, which in some cases even led to illness. Some interviewees referred to this openly, others were more circumspect: 'In those years counselling did not exist as it does today. No, we had to come to terms with things by ourselves. I think there were only a couple of times when I could not manage it by myself and had to see a doctor, other than that I had to cope on my own.'[107]

In general, women felt more helpless and vulnerable than men. They often had to defend themselves on their own and did not have the help and protection of an organised community, as did the Ukrainian, Polish or Baltic migrants. Outside the family and their usually limited circle of friends and acquaintances, it was only the churches and a few NGOs that provided counselling. Some German migrants were definitely scarred by the discrimination they endured, and although most wounds appeared to have healed with

time, it is probable that for some these experiences left a legacy of cautious behaviour and insecure personalities.

Problems of the second generation

The negativity associated with being German was not limited to the generation that experienced the war. It was also experienced by their children and grandchildren. Perpetuated by parents the media and also by comics that were widely read by British children for decades, the war between Britain and Germany was often glorified in a stereotypical way. War games such as the popular 'Achtung Spitfire' were played by children on streets, in playgrounds and schoolyards or on the beach. The traditional game of 'Cowboys and Indians' became 'English and Germans'. Words like 'Blitz', 'Schweinehund' and 'Achtung' became part of nearly every British child's vocabulary. As a result of their peer group, the children of German parents sometimes felt the stigma attached to Germany and being German much more directly than the adults. This was particularly the case when National Socialism was the subject of a history lesson. It seems that in most classes, historical events were labelled either good or bad and Germans were portrayed only in negative terms, leading to the simplistic conclusion that to be German was the same as being a Nazi. 'Sometimes my kids came home from school crying and saying "They called us murderers." […] My children became very shy and got an inferiority complex. […] They asked me "Mama, what did you do over there, did you murder?"'[108]

Children could also experience discrimination by having to play the part of the bad German in the war games that children played: 'He came home one day, he was only 4 or 5 years old, and said: "Mummy why is it that when we play I've always got to play the baddy, they always make me play the baddy because daddy is German."'[109] It seemed this was particularly the case for the children of former POWs: 'Your dad has been in the German army, then your dad is a Nazi.'[110] Most parents only remembered isolated incidents, and it seems safe to assume that the majority of the children survived without suffering long-term psychological damage. Several parents, however, indicated that such incidents happened more frequently and hindered their children's development in the long run. Some even attributed a child's decision to settle in Germany or elsewhere as the result of discrimination experienced during their school years. Andreas, for example, was frequently bullied as a 14-year old during the 1960s because his father was German. To begin with he did not tell his parents, but when he started pretending he was ill to avoid going to school it became apparent that the underlying reason was the continuous teasing about his background and the collective chanting of 'Nazi go home'. Subsequently he left school, trained as a craftsman, left Britain and made Hamburg his home.[111] Michael's experiences were even worse. He also went to Germany, but not before suffering mental illness: 'At boarding school, the older one coped with the situation better, but our Michael had swastikas painted on his ruler and they sent him a Christmas card with an SS-man in front of a concentration camp titled "Merry Christmas". All this sort of thing. It was probably meant as a joke, but Michael did not take it well.'[112]

It was also noticeable that many of our interviewees' children no longer lived in Britain, preferring either Germany or another country. Whether this was due to the general increase in mobility or, as was the case with several suicides or attempted

suicides, the result of cruelty and teasing experienced in childhood, remains unanswered as current research has not yet addressed these issues systematically. What is clear is that although children of Ukrainian and Polish origin spoke of the racist views and attitudes of their classmates, the racism was not as frequent or severe as that experienced by German children.[113] The attitudes of British children often reminded the German parents, very painfully, that their families were perceived as being different or alien. The way they were singled out—for distinctively German characteristics in particular—was linked to a set of negatively perceived traits, of which the most obvious was language. It is therefore not surprising that by the time they started school at the latest, most children tried to avoid speaking German in public.[114] Others stopped speaking German completely, which indicates the enormous conflict they must have felt. 'Then they said to me, we will not speak that language anymore, the children have called us Nazis.'[115]

Quiet adaptation

Children refusing to speak German can be seen as one link in a chain of behaviour adopted in order not to stand out as Germans. As a result of bad experiences, the migrants felt compelled to avoid anything that would give them away as German in public. Giving their children English names, or names commonly used in both countries, was certainly part of a strategy to be less obtrusive in their English-speaking environment. Some Germans mentioned acquaintances who had anglicised their family names, claiming that it was at the insistence of their British wife. Such action was taken to help ensure that their children had a good start in British society. However, some behaviour commonly seen as German did prove useful, for example, the ability to adapt to given situations, to meet expectations, and, if necessary, to obey the authorities and follow rules without questioning. 'To remain unnoticed, and submerge if necessary, was the motto.'[116] Interestingly, the strategies individuals used to achieve a successful life in Britain were described using a number of adjectives associated with a passive, unobtrusive character: to be quiet, to be accepting, not to get excited, not to shout, to be withdrawn and modest, to be able to cope with insults. These characteristics are in complete contrast to the stereotypical view of German behaviour, which is often seen as aggressive, loud, dominant, know-it-all and self-opinionated.

Not all were able to overcome the negative images and stereotyping they experienced. Some felt the pressure so strongly that they made a conscious decision to deny their nationality and pretend to be Austrian, Dutch or Swiss.[117] Here the ethnic Germans had an advantage as they could simply state the country they were born in, and the British habit of asking where a person was from rather than their nationality helped: 'The English always ask you "Where do you come from" and when I say "I come from Poland" I am automatically seen as a Pole. But they don't know that I am not Polish, and how am I supposed to explain that to them?'[118] One Briton introduced his bride as Austrian,[119] and in another case a British husband suggested to his German wife that she pretend to be Irish: 'He felt sorry for us, because they always harassed us.'[120]

Renouncing one's nationality appeared to almost be a necessity in the early post-war years as a protection from hostility. In retrospect, most regarded the time between their arrival in the late 1940s and the end of the 1960s as the most difficult. Whereas they themselves wanted to forget and move on from the war, they were constantly reminded of

the past, and thus forced to relive memories and experiences over and over again. Most acknowledged that things are now very different, in part, due to the integration brought about by the European Union. Most thought that Britain's younger generations were more broad minded, more cosmopolitan and generally more open, to the extent that many today learn German. But some remained cautious: 'When I travel by train, I never read anything German, I always take something English to read, and I found out that many others do the same. But the young Germans in this country, they don't. But we try to avoid raising any anti-German feelings.'[121]

Perceptions

When examining the German migrants' perceptions of the British, the most striking feature was how this varied depending on the parts of the country they had settled. Germans who remained in Scotland, particularly in the Highlands, praised the qualities of the Scottish people and at the same time their own successful integration: 'Scots are very nice, wonderful people.'[122] The Scottish tendency to differentiate between 'them' (in this case the English) and 'us' was adopted by most of these Germans, who even stressed their feelings of solidarity with the Scots resentment of the English: 'Historically they have been suffering for a long time under the English, in the wars they fought against each other. They have also been a second class people compared to the English, and many of the Scottish nationalists still feel so today. In my view the whole lifestyle is closely related to that of the Germans.'[123] The positive characteristics of the Scots were often compared with the supposedly negative ones of the English, and sometimes linked to the multicultural nature of the English cities: 'It is easy to make contacts in Glasgow. You can talk to anybody in the street and he will invite you to his home. […] The English have certain ways that the Scottish people can't bear, because the Scots are honest and funny and they need their alcohol. That is Scotland's central heating. […] If I had the choice, both my sisters live in England they would never get me down there. […] I only go down occasionally to visit, but in Birmingham there are more black people than white.'[124]

In contrast, attitudes towards the English held by Germans who had lived in England turned out to be more varied. They generally ranged from caution and scepticism to rejection. Very few expressed a wholeheartedly positive view, and for most there was some disappointment. They had not achieved the degree of acceptance they had hoped for, which perhaps reflects the frequently quoted wish of Germans to be loved by everybody. They all claimed to have had friendships with English people, but also said that it had been very difficult to form deep friendships: 'I couldn't really warm to the English. I have always tried to be a nice and helpful neighbour, so did my husband. But somehow, a closer relationship was never possible. I've invited them often, but they never returned the invitation.'[125]

Despite clearly acknowledging their neighbours' and colleagues' positive characteristics, such as politeness and tolerance, the interviewees often referred to negative traits such as the traditional coolness and reserve of the English. They saw these as differences in 'mentality', but still found them difficult to accept, even after 50 years: 'I like the tolerance of the English, but it is not always tolerance, it is also indifference. […] And with their politeness, one never knows exactly: Is it real politeness or…is it

somehow…they are not as open and approachable as the Germans, particularly not as the Berliners.'[126] The frequent references to differences in the way of thinking and the fact that they found English society generally as somewhat cold and distanced could be seen as a reflection of their own limited willingness to integrate. After their early negative experiences they might not have been prepared to make further attempts. The impression we got was that a superficial level of acceptance had been achieved, but many German migrants still had deeply held reservations. It appears that many chose a strategy of inner withdrawal which manifested itself in a certain distancing from their adopted country.

Finally, the predictable downgrading of characteristics commonly seen as British served to emphasise supposedly German virtues, which also contributed to the construction of their identity as a German living in Britain. This was particularly noticeable when they talked about performance at work, where they clearly judged their work to have been more effective and more productive, as well as 'much better and faster than the British'.[127] Other Germanic stereotypes such as conscientiousness and cleanliness, were also mentioned: 'The English said they'd never had such clean hospitals as in those days when all the Germans were there. They said: "It has never been so clean here." But of course, one has to be very careful when talking about this.'[128] And finally, they often pointed to the success they had achieved in material terms, despite their difficult beginnings. This was a particular source of pride when it had involved buying property purely with their own resources and without assistance, as the following account illustrates: 'I've always worked, and was never a burden to society, I would have been too proud for that. And when my husband fell ill and we didn't have any money, I taught at home and took on sewing for others in order to make ends meet. On no account would I have considered going to social services, I was too proud for that. I can take care of myself and my family. I don't want any money from you.'[129]

Dealing with the past

Personal accounts of the war and the post-war years together with reflecting on their personal histories took up a substantial part of individual interviews. The events they had experienced during these years had left indelible marks on their lives. Many women had suffered the same sort of traumas, in particular the bombing of cities, flight and expulsion, sexual abuse and rape. Men talked about fighting on the frontline and the experience of surrender and captivity, but they also spoke of losing home and family. All this was part of a history that was impossible to share with neighbours, colleagues or friends, since most had no knowledge of their difficulties during and immediately after the war. Because they were so geographically dispersed, there was also little opportunity to share their suffering and pain with other Germans. Most had to deal with these traumatic events on their own. This contrasted sharply with their British neighbours, for whom the war was a shared experience, and moreover, a shared experience that played an important role in the construction of the British national identity for several decades. Many Germans living in Britain felt excluded, embarrassed or even hurt when neighbours talked about life during the Blitz in London or discussed the latest war film. The British war was obviously not their war.

Interviewees, predominantly those who came from Germany's eastern territories, talked repeatedly and with bitterness about the strong interest and empathy amongst the

British population for the fate of threatened nations or ethnic groups elsewhere in the world. They would point to recent political developments, the expulsions and ethnic cleansing in south-eastern Europe, for example. Nearly all were reminded of the similarities with their experiences which, had never received comparable interest. Concern about their plight appeared to have been withheld because of their German origins, and yet they were held collectively responsible for the pain the British population had suffered: 'Not all Germans were Nazis, but nobody talks about the extent to which the people suffered in Germany. We had to cope with a lot.'[130]

The migrants were frequently confronted with German war crimes and negative images of Germany, particularly in the immediate post-war years. Thus, they had to consider and come to terms with their nationality and Germanness in a much more direct way than Germans who did not migrate. A former POW remembered having been asked by his work colleagues to talk about Hitler and the war, but he had refused: 'I always said "no idea, no idea" as I didn't want to know about it for many years.'[131] In contrast, a Sudeten German pointed out that nobody ever involved her in discussions about the war: 'Nobody talked to me personally about Hitler or anything, probably intentionally, they wanted to avoid the subject because they knew I was German.'[132]

Irrespective of gender, nearly all interviewees were sensitive when the subject of National Socialism was raised: the atmosphere often became noticeably tense. In the intervening years most had come to terms with the Nazi era and the crimes that had been committed, often jointly with their children when it cropped up as part of the child's history classes. Only very few found the topic so unbearable that they vehemently refused to engage with the subject, even to the point of denying the crimes took place: 'I don't know why they present this here all the time. It is all complete lies, what they show us here. Do they think we are stupid? […] Sometimes I watch it a bit, then I have to leave the room until it's finished. […] I know that it's not all true, it's their propaganda.'[133] The majority however, gave the impression that they had reflected on the past in a more considered way: 'We were really fanatical. […] Hitler came through one of the neighbouring towns and we had to go and I handed over a bouquet of flowers to him. This man radiated something special, and that is what they still say today. And I really experienced this effect, he had something… he mesmerised people. And when I see these things on TV today, I can't understand it, and I think how on earth could I…it was complete mass hysteria.'[134]

Generally, women responded in a more personal and emotional way. They often expressed shame or guilt about the war crimes, whereas the ex-POWs were more likely to rationalise what happened and to reject feelings of guilt. Using the vocabulary of the time, they spoke about 'fair actions', 'honour' and 'responsibility'. There was also a noticeable tendency to compare German war crimes with questionable actions carried out by the Allies, and a desire to forget the war: 'Somehow I am of the opinion that neither the Nazis, nor the others are completely free of any dirt. Things happened on the other side which were just as terrible as the things that happened on the German side. The war is gone and one should bury it once and for all.'[135]

Aspects of identity

At the time of the interviews the Germans we spoke to had spent more than 50 years of their lives in Britain. Most had married in Britain, worked, brought up children, bought homes and made friends and acquaintances. It would have been logical to assume that so many years in Britain would have loosened the ties to Germany and, at least partially, resulted in the adoption of British habits and a degree of naturalisation.

Citizenship

The latter, however, is only true to a limited extent. Only half of those we interviewed had applied for and been granted British citizenship. Of these, a large number had waited 25 years before applying. An examination of each group revealed interesting results: of the recruited women, two-thirds had become British citizens and only one-third of the ex-POWs. In contrast nearly all the war brides had become British citizens, but it should be remembered that this happened automatically if they married before the end of 1948.

There were a variety of reasons for becoming naturalised, most of which were pragmatic. Many of those who took this step had still found the decision emotionally difficult. One of the key drivers, irrespective of gender, was that it was necessary to get a mortgage. This explains the low interest among the ex-POWs. Most of them had married British women, and by virtue of their spouse became credit worthy. Another key reason for women getting British citizenship was that they did not want to be separated from their (British) children at passport control when going on holiday to Germany. Women married to other nationals mentioned the importance of having at least one British parent to help prevent their children being discriminated against: 'When we had to fill in forms for the children, we always had to state the citizenship of the parents. […] Therefore I decided to become British.'[136]

Their son's career choice—he wanted to become a pilot with the Royal Air Force—was a decisive factor for Paulus and Inge. In the end, becoming British did not help their son. They had originally come from Silesia, and were told that applicants born to parents from behind the iron curtain were excluded for security reasons.[137] Another interviewee felt obliged to acquire British citizenship in 1971 for reasons of job security: 'There was also always a little bit of pressure at the end of the financial year. Yes, and they advised me, if I wanted to keep my work, it would be better, if I took on the English nationality.' Later on, he added apologetically: 'It doesn't mean much anyway, it is only a piece of paper.'[138] Some female interviewees remembered feeling pressured by their families to take up citizenship, but German husbands could also be pressured by their British wives to identify more with their English family: 'She feared that I would return to Germany and didn't want me to split my allegiance.'[139]

The percentages of those who failed versus those who were successful in applying for British citizenship are unclear, but generally it seems there was only modest interest in citizenship. In his 1958 study, J.A.Tannahill estimated that only 5 per cent of all European workers obtained British citizenship. The cost at the time was £20, an amount that many could not afford or did not want to pay. The reasons given then were similar to those given by our interviewees 50 years later: 'Many say they do not feel that naturalisation will make much difference. With good reason they take the view that

people will still regard them as “foreigners” even if naturalised for the sake of their children or because they are in more responsible jobs where British nationality is an advantage or a necessity.’[140] So it appears that interest amongst the EVWs was even lower than amongst the exPOWs. Nonetheless, between 1954 and 1956 the Home Office received 1,580 applications from ex-POWs, although numbers were declining over the period.[141]

The fact that the process was protracted must have deterred many. It began with the completion of a four-page form, available from stationary shops, that had to be signed by a magistrate. The applicant also needed to have lived for of at least five years in Britain, and to provide proof of good character and four British guarantors. The completed form was sent to the Home Office, and at the same time the applicant, at their own expense, had to make known their intentions in two editions of the local newspaper. This alone caused some concern.[142] When all formalities had been taken care of, and assuming there were no objections from the local population or relevant authorities, the naturalisation fee was paid (in 1950 this was £9) and the applicant swore an oath of allegiance to the crown.[143]

It was striking that no interviewee gave loyalty to Britain or a desire to belong to British society as a reason for changing their citizenship. In retrospect, nearly all regretted the loss of their German citizenship, and many did not even attempt to become naturalised. They could see no advantage in it, and keeping their original citizenship seemed to be a way of expressing their sense of exclusion from British society: ‘We are not really integrated, not really. Someone who feels really integrated would have given up the German citizenship.’[144] There were others who held on to their citizenship because they felt particularly proud of being German. Strongly nationalistic statements came mainly from Sudeten German and ex-POWs, and was probably the result of attitudes formed during the political socialisation and indoctrination that took place in the Sudetenland and amongst the Hitler-Youth and the Wehrmacht. Some remarks revealed intense and undiminished feelings of German nationality: ‘You remain what you were born as.’[145] ‘I am proud to be a German.’[146] ‘I was born a German and I will die a German.’[147] ‘In my heart I am still a German.’[148] ‘I will remain what I am.’[149] ‘I want to stay German, that means a lot to me.’[150] For these people, giving up their German passports would have felt like denying their personality, their past and their origins. The fact that without British citizenship they were excluded from voting in national elections did not bother them. Most expressed no interest in politics or in the right to vote. For some this political abstinence could have been the result of their experiences with National Socialism, ‘I don’t want to have anything to do with politics again.’[151] For others it was more to do with their feelings of exclusion: ‘One remains a foreigner anyway.’[152]

There were also those whose identification with their country of origin, and feelings of Germanness, had waned, partially at least: ‘We don’t belong to Germany but we aren’t English either.’[153] Many saw their identity as mixed, with the particular situation determining how they behaved. A confrontation with ‘the other’, whilst travelling for example, would bring a particular facet to the fore, feeling more British when in Germany, but rather German when in Britain, for example. Several said dual citizenship and holding both passports would best express their feelings. Others found a different

way out of this dilemma: regarding themselves as Europeans. These migrants welcomed European integration and saw themselves as members of the European Union.

Heimat

The frequent emphasis on Germanness that came through in the interviews was usually with reference to pre-war Germany rather than the Federal Republic of Germany. Interviewees linked home and *Heimat* with the region they had grown up in, learned their mother tongue, gone to school and put down roots. Their memories were rarely free of sentimentality, but neither did they distort the past. The vast majority were still competent German speakers, despite the odd Anglicism that had crept in. Sometimes a regional accent still gave away precise origins. Only two ex-POWs opted to conduct the interview in English. After living and working in an English-speaking environment for so long, the fact that most still preferred to be interviewed in German was another reflection of the strong bond with their former home. Several mentioned that they made an effort to read and write German regularly, although others only started attending English-German circles or German-speaking congregations when they retired.

The strength of the links to their *Heimat* exhibited by the interviewees was remarkable. This bond was usually intensified by regular visits, which for some from eastern Europe had only become possible after the end of the Cold War. These journeys back to the place of their childhood and youth were incredibly important, despite the fact that exposing the big gaps between memory and reality that sometimes occurred could be depressing. Often places could no longer be found, or had drastically changed: ‘It was traumatic, to see East Prussia so destroyed, the Polish part, this former thriving agrarian country, neglected and overgrown.’[154] But sometimes the experience could be very positive, as it was for Hermine when visiting her parents’ house in Gdansk. In the intervening years the old villa had been divided into several flats, and after some initial hesitation she was allowed to see her former bedroom. Although she too complained about the poor state of the house, she did not talk about the stereotypical ‘Polish mismanagement’, showing instead sympathy for the cramped living conditions and the difficult life in Poland. For her, the human side of this encounter and the hospitality of the people she met were very touching. She even contrasted the friendly and open reception in Poland with the rather cool reception she had experienced in England.[155] Some spoke about friends who had returned to east Germany after the wall came down to live out their retirement in their old *Heimat.*

Efforts to retain close links with the German language and culture were also demonstrated by the numerous satellite dishes we saw in interviewees’ homes. Nearly all said they watched films and political or cultural programmes on German-speaking channels. In addition, some also regularly bought German magazines or books. The majority talked about contacts with relatives, friends or acquaintances in Germany. With two exceptions, all of the interviewees had visited Germany, several on a yearly basis: it is ‘wonderful’ to go there,[156] the people are ‘so nice’ and we have ‘the same attitudes’.[157] It is ‘very nice to be amongst Germans and to go shopping in German shops’,[158] to soak up the atmosphere of Berlin, or go to Düsseldorf, although people are ‘much more elegant there’ and one feels a little inferior.[159] Interviewees also commented that they

thought the pensions were higher, the health system better and the apartments more desirable: ‘Those large wardrobes and the large beds, everything is so big, the rooms, the curtains. That is like a dream.’[160] These positive assessments were sometimes mixed with a certain pride in what their nation had been able to achieve: ‘If you remember how destroyed Germany was and what it is like today, it is unbelievable, and it wouldn’t have been possible in any other country, to rebuild it so quickly. Only they [!] can do that.’[161] There was a strong tendency to idealise and identify with Germany’s material success. A few comments hinted at a deep dissatisfaction with life in Britain, but doubts about their decision to leave the country that had subsequently turned itself around in economic terms were also put into perspective: ‘Here we also achieved quite a bit, but not as much as in Germany.’[162]

Although most interviewees were very complimentary about their homeland, they also had reservations about and criticisms of contemporary German society. Several said they felt alien in today’s Germany and could not feel comfortable in a country where they would not be allowed to hang up washing or mow lawns on a Sunday.[163] Germany’s material affluence was balanced by Britain’s less materialistic, more spiritual values. While they enjoyed visiting Germany, comments indicated they did not feel that people there were as ‘free and tolerant as the English’, or that one would have to ‘clean the windows every week’,[164] for example. The Germans were thought to have become ‘too complicated’ and ‘too arrogant’,[165] they were too ‘fussy’ and ‘made life difficult with trivial matters’.[166]

Overall, Germany ‘wasn’t what it used to be’: ‘The numerous foreigners’ [!], money had ‘spoilt the people’ and made them ‘more distant’, family life had suffered and Germany had become too Americanised—‘especially the language, which has become ghastly’.[167] Despite admiring its economic achievements, several interviewees said they now felt more ‘like a stranger’ in Germany than in Britain.[168] Many had ‘lost touch’, and become ‘more and more critical’ until they noticed that they ‘did not fit in there anymore’.[169] ‘When I am there, I want to come back very quickly, I don’t get on with Germans anymore. […] Now we don’t want to go there anymore, we are still old-fashioned Germans.’[170] It is likely that this feeling of being a stranger in modern Germany was linked to the fact that in recent years close relatives or friends in Germany were no longer alive.

The ambivalence expressed became particularly obvious in critical statements about Germany and the Germans: The way they saw themselves as Germans contrasted with, but also reflected, many years spent in Britain, during the course of which they had changed and developed a very particular form of Britishness. As such, returning to settle in Germany no longer held the same appeal: ‘I think I have really settled here. But when I go to Germany I like it very much there. And when it comes to returning, I long to get back to England. Perhaps this is because everything, my home is now here. It is very good knowing where one belongs. I really feel at home here now […] and even the English women sometimes say to me: ah, you are one of us.’[171] Others, however, thought that a lifestyle in which they split their time between England and Germany would be the ideal: ‘If I had enough money, I would buy a house in the Black Forest and I would fly between the two places whenever I felt like it. That would be very nice.’[172]

Loneliness

At the time they were interviewed, all the participants were pensioners. Many had been widowed and remained on their own. Sometimes children and grandchildren lived near by, but often they lived in another part of the country, Europe or even further afield. With age and a shrinking social circle, the past—and thus memories of Germany—occupied their thoughts more often: 'Now that I am older, my thoughts are always in Germany.'[173] For some this prompted them to seek out former friends and relatives. Others looked to the German churches for comfort, especially on retirement or the death of their spouse. It seems these churches, in trying to alleviate the migrants' loneliness, had become a sort of substitute for the distant homelands. It became apparent that there were plenty of opportunities for specifically German social contact provided by numerous British-German or exclusively German circles, as well as by gatherings at the German Welfare Council and the German YMCA in London. These opportunities were mainly taken up by women, owing to their generally higher life expectancy. For some interviewees, these regular meetings were really their only outlet for communication and social exchange and were often the highlight of an otherwise very uneventful week. The opportunity to speak German or sing a childhood song was greatly appreciated.

The social isolation experienced by our interviewees was not a new phenomenon. As far back as 1963, the annual report of the German Welfare Council highlighted the 'care for the elderly single women' as an important and difficult task.[174] This was particularly so for those women who had never bought their own home, who had 'never really settled' and subsequently expressed the wish to 'return to Germany after retirement. But they had an unrealistic image of Germany.'[175] Growing isolation and loneliness was often linked with meagre finances resulting from relatively low pensions, which meant that they had to rely on additional help in the form of social security benefit. Without other sources of income they couldn't afford much in old age, despite having worked the whole of their adult lives in Britain.

In light of these sometimes very modest circumstances, it was not surprising that several of those interviewees had contemplated returning to Germany. Some said that they had thought long and hard about taking this step, particularly once their husbands had died, and had even visited Germany specifically with deciding whether they would return in mind. In the end it was family and personal reasons that kept them in Britain. Sometimes it was the feeling of being useful as a grandmother,[176] their advanced age, tending their husband's grave or the feeling of no longer belonging in Germany that made them stay.

Lifestyles

Owning a home was not only a key reason for remaining in Britain, often it also played an important role in the interviews as it embodied so much of what they had strived for since leaving Germany—memories of family life, the replacement of the home they had lost in the war, a refuge and a place they could call their own: 'I am longing for my little house, even though it is not in the best area. But it is my palace and I feel comfortable.'[177] The importance of their home seemed particularly intense when a lot of time and personal effort had been invested in it. Men pointed, with a degree of pride, to the alterations they had made to their houses, and women showed off the interiors and the gardens. Many

could not consider a return to Germany because they simply could not leave the property that represented a lifetime goal for which they had worked so hard. To leave this for a flat in Germany was inconceivable, and they appreciated the freedom and independence it gave them: 'We can do what we want.'[178]

The importance of their private domain may have been linked to not wanting to attract attention to the fact they were German. However, it was fairly easy for an outsider to identify the owner's origins from the look of the gardens and the way the homes had been furnished. Whilst very few actually put the much admired large German sideboards and three-piece suites into their rather small British front rooms, many had carefully stitched white net curtains hanging at the windows. The 'business card of the house',[179] they are symbolic of the traditional German lifestyle. Thus many women had obviously spared neither trouble nor expense to get the necessary material from Germany, even if the end product had attracted the curious gaze of neighbours.[180]

Sometimes during an interview, a particular object, such as a clock, cushion or piece of porcelain, would be presented, and its special significance lay in the fact that it came from Germany. There were also photographs, pictures or wall hangings that were reminiscent of the old *Heimat,* as were the ornaments and souvenirs that decorated the shelves. As their owners often stressed, all these decorations served to make the rooms more *gemütlich* and pretty. The chance to eat and cook what they liked were other things that a home made possible. In the first few years after the war in particular, a food treat would be something they were used to in Germany, but was extremely difficult to get hold of in Britain. Black bread was sorely missed, and many willingly endured long journeys to buy it. Several women quickly learnt to cook the way that most British husbands appreciated, but others spoke of never having learnt how to cook properly due to the lack of food in Germany after the war. Cookery books were used to rectify such skills gaps, and rusty skills were brushed up by looking over the shoulder of visiting mothers. Those who married eastern European husbands had to also learn something of Polish or Ukrainian cuisine.

Many families retained the traditional German way of cooking, but as it is generally so time consuming, German meals were usually only served at weekends and special occasions. In later years this reduced further, and it was only at special family gatherings that the traditional dishes would be served. While the migrants may have been cooking German dishes less, since the war British cuisine has become increasingly international. After many years, the necessary ingredients and spices are now much more available due to the number and variety of delicatessens, often run by European migrants. Whilst in earlier years the women had their relatives send or bring with them special ingredients from Germany, today everything from black bread to German sausage can be bought in Britain. Over the years most migrants had changed their cooking and eating habits, although some peculiarities had been retained, such as steaming vegetables, or adding bacon, butter or spices during the cooking. Everyday cooking for most had become a synthesis of German, British and international influences, which, as everywhere else, included deep frozen and ready-made meals, and sandwiches.

On the whole, the German influences on households and families were less visible where ex-POWs had married British wives. Of course, there were some exceptions: occasionally the 'Easter hare' had to make an unusual detour to Britain.[181] But German men saw their main contribution to British culture—and in this they were unanimous—as

introducing or furthering the spread of the Christmas tree. For many years after the war, celebrating Christmas seemed to be far less important in Britain than it was in Germany. In England at least there was one bank holiday, but in Scotland there was none. All of the ex-POWs we interviewed were convinced that the significance of Christmas in Scotland had grown, and that they were the first to have a decorated tree in their area: 'We brought Christmas', was the motto.[182]

Nearly all interviewees mentioned the fact that celebrating the highly emotional and festive aspects of Christmas was barely a consideration in Scotland. Irrespective of gender, missing Holy Night and Christmas Day was hard to bear: 'I really felt homesick. […] On Christmas it was terrible.'[183] South of the Scottish border, 25 December was a bank holiday. But it was (and still is) celebrated in a less festive way than in Germany, and this initially alienated several of the migrants: 'Christmas in England is like carnival. And that always made me very sad. Like any carnival, there is so much to drink. In Germany it is still a real family occasion and I kept it that way. Even after the children were married […] we spend Holy Night together. And as long as my husband lived, we also celebrated the 6 January together, the Ukrainian Christmas.'[184] For many children, at Easter, and even more so at Christmas, having at least one German parent became a positive advantage. When it came to the very practical question of whether the presents should be given on the 24 as in Germany, or the 25 December as in Britain, this problem was usually solved with a compromise involving a bit of both.

Taking stock

Most interviewees spoke of feeling at home in Britain, and for some the country had become almost a second *Heimat.* Here they had found security during the uncertainty of the post-war years. Subsequently several had bought houses, nearly all had brought up children and spent long years working in Britain before retiring. Despite the initial difficulties most had settled in well. Those married to British partners had enjoyed advantages due to the doors this opened for them. Social contacts came from work and children, but they often proved fairly temporary. Deep ties were generally limited to the core family, and it was family that became the main reason for them remaining in Britain. Of course, over the years the links to relatives in Germany became less strong as parents and siblings died, and relationships with the next generation were often distant or superficial.

The immediate family provided the most important emotional link to British society, and so where the marriage had remained childless, where there was a lot of tension between parents and children or when the spouse had died prematurely, a person would be less rooted in their community and life was likely to have become lonely. Irrespective of gender and personal circumstances, most Germans maintained some emotional distance from Britain and the British. Many interviewees expressed a degree of resignation as they looked back, even those who, on the whole, were positive about their life in Britain. Few had no reservations about their decision to emigrate; for most it had been a reflective process of weighing up the pros and cons. One answered: 'We lived our life for the children. It was worth it for me, so I shouldn't grumble […] but had I known then what I know now, I would perhaps not have left. One has to accept that.'[185] But there were also entirely positive attitudes: 'I don't regret anything, it all went well for me, it all

developed as it should have done.'[186] Many were grateful for the chance to start a new life: 'We did indeed leave our feelings in the East. […] God was truly good to us. It wasn't an easy lot, but I look back with gratitude.'[187] For others it seemed to have been about making the best of it: 'This is now my home, I have everything I need here. I had good times and bad times. One has to accept it. […] If I had a home [in Germany] perhaps it would have been different.'[188]

When taking stock, more than a third of all those we interviewed had a predominantly negative view. Despite mentioning positive events, this group said that they would not take the same step again if they were offered it today. Extreme comments such as: 'I would never voluntarily go to England again',[189] or 'If I were to make the decision again? Then I would be in Berlin today',[190] were not unusual. The alternatives mentioned were not necessarily always in Germany. For some, going to a different European country, such as Sweden or Switzerland, or even somewhere outside Europe appeared much more attractive: 'England, not again',[191] 'I would go a bit further.'[192] One woman, who initially only wanted to use Britain as a springboard to further migration, expressed it a little more cautiously but no less decisively: 'We got stuck here by marrying English men.'[193] The feeling of having got stuck, of having accepted things rather than being more proactive at a particular stage of their live, came through strongly in several interviews.

The degree to which some of the migrants disregarded what they had achieved in financial and social terms when they looked back was evident from remarks, for example those from Heide. At the time we interviewed her she was an active member of the community in which she and her husband had achieved a relatively high level of prosperity. But the wounds from experiences she had during her first few weeks training in Oldham—of which she still refused to speak—had not healed: 'I often say that if I were born again, I wouldn't go to Britain. No, not to England again. […] I have really improved my circumstances here, but the experiences of Oldham. That was the worst time of my life.'[194] It was doubts of a different and very specific kind that plagued Ewald, who had also done well in material terms, made friends and had no negative experiences in Britain: 'If I were young again in 1948/49 I would go home. […] I was born there. And I often think that I ran away and deserted them.' His final words to us seemed to summarise the feelings of many of his fellow migrants: 'We started with nothing. […] Only work, we only thought of work, we worked all our lives until it was too late.'[195]

6
Five life stories

This chapter contains the summarised life stories of four German migrants and one former POW which is told in the words of his British widow. In the preceding chapters, short extracts from these interviews have been selected to highlight similarities or differences in the migrants' perspectives, attitudes and experiences. In contrast, this chapter presents each narrative in the context given by the respondants so as to better portray the flavour and pattern of the life as a whole. Each of the interviews carried out for this study would have been worthy of inclusion, since each told a unique story. The five selected are particularly diverse, not only in the way each is narrated, but also in the connections made between what may seem like isolated events. The themes that are important to the individuals also vary: A certain period of the interviewee's life dominates for one, whereas experiences connected to a specific historical or social event, or a single strand such as family or career, predominate in others. What they all share is that the experience of the Second World War and post-war migration are the two most significant events of their lives.

For the purposes of this publication the interviews which took 2–5 hours using a minimal interventionist approach, had to be drastically shortened. When selecting the final content care was taken not to distort the overall pattern of each, that is, the themes each interviewee developed in the course of their narrative.

Margarete, for example, sees her life in Britain as rich and fulfilled. It remains centred around the large family for whom she was, for many years, the main breadwinner. Coming to Britain enabled her to achieve her childhood dream of a university education, which the war initially prevented. Her narrative contrasts sharply with that of *Hedwig,* who sees the initial years of her life in Britain as a permanent struggle. She regards a single decision—falling in love with the wrong man—as the reason for the difficulties that followed. Then there is *Paula* whose narrative is dominated by experiencing the Dresden bombing and how she survived afterwards. The war remains the central event of her life, and continues to affect and influence how she spends her retirement. This is also true—albeit in a different way—for *Erwin* who says that life as a POW in Britain and being forced to confront Germany's war crimes made him rethink his upbringing. However, he acknowledges that there were other unpleasant experiences which marked his personality. Last but not least there is *Jean,* a widow, who talks about the love she found with Karl, a former POW. Her narrative tells of an enriching intercultural marriage that developed despite many adversities.

Margarete T.: England was good to me.

Margarete, born in 1929 in Eger, a German speaking part of the then Czechoslovakia, fled to Bavaria with her family in 1946. While in Czechoslovakia she attended grammar school until year 6, with the intention of gaining the Abitur (A-levels) and going on to study medicine. But 'the war changed everything'. Following her father's death her mother had to support four children, and under these circumstances Margarete's educational ambitions were simply unrealistic. After the war she did try to find a school to finish her education, which was difficult as many schools had been destroyed. She also felt an obligation towards her mother to become self-supporting, but finding paid work was difficult.

It was an impossible situation; there was no work. […] I wanted to get out of Bavaria, as there was no room for us in that village and there was only work in agriculture or domestic service and I did not want that. I felt too good for that. Really, I thought I did not come into the world to be a maid with a family or work on a farm. […] I had written many letters, I thought perhaps to work in catering, had written to Switzerland. I wanted to improve my languages; I had a little English and French. But wherever I wrote I was refused. […] Then I saw this advert in the newspaper that they were looking for girls in the cotton industry in England, for two years, or longer if you wanted, and I asked my mother for permission as I was under 21. […] I really wanted to get out, to experience life. […] When the war finished I was 15, 16, at 17 I came to Germany, now I just wanted to live.

Margarete was accepted for the textile industry under the Westward Ho scheme. Together with about 200 other Sudeten Germans, and also some Polish and Austrian women, she arrived in Oldham in January 1950 to train as a ring spinner. Real work started after an initial three months training in Rochdale. She emphasises throughout her interview that, although the work was very hard and unpleasant, she was overwhelmed by the friendliness of the English people. 'I can only say positive things about the English. They have been nice to me in every respect, and I lived with them. Perhaps I was lucky, but I am also an optimist, and I can adapt myself very well. […] I earned £4 a week, paid £1 rent for my private accommodation, £1 for my bus fare and food in the canteen, £1 for shopping, and I saved £1 every week. We did not drink or smoke, impossible, we were girls from respectable backgrounds.'

Initially she only wanted to stay in England until she had completed her contract and was fluent in English. Her dream was to go further overseas: 'England was only as a stepping stone: From England to America, from England to Australia or Canada. I was very interested in Canada. But they didn't want me. They simply rejected me. I was too young. That was that.'

As with most of the recruited women who stayed in Britain, she met her future husband, a local man, at a dance, and decided to remain longer despite the export problems the textile industry was facing. In 1952, she started nursing training at a local hospital. After finishing in 1954 she got married, had five children, and was fully occupied caring for them: 'I was happy as housewife and mother. I cooked and baked, did all those things and all that gave me great pleasure. And we were happily married.'

Without warning the family's life was to change dramatically. In 1967, when Margarete was 38 and her then youngest daughter was 3 years old, her husband suffered a

nervous breakdown and could no longer work. During the course of the illness his business went bankrupt and debts accumulated. Margarete found herself in almost the same situation as her mother after the war: She had to find a way of providing for her family. It was impossible to return to nursing while she had small children because of the shift work. However, although sad, the death of her mother in Germany the same year gave her a small sum of money that allowed her to make a bold decision: she answered a general call from the local council to enter adult education and embarked on the further study she had wanted to do after the war—only this time more out of necessity than choice. She enrolled in an O-level course and gained 5 O-levels the same year, followed by 3 A-levels a year later. During this time she earned money mainly by teaching German privately. Margarete had secured a place at a teacher training college in Manchester and was due to start the course when the arrival of another baby, her sixth child, forced her to postpone this.

A year later, with her mother-in-law and the *Sisters of the Holy Cross* looking after the baby when she was at college, she was ready to embark on what had been her life-long ambition: training for a profession. 'I studied and finished my teacher's training. […] When I received my title my mother in-law said to me "Oh you are very lucky" but she did not know that I often studied until three o'clock in the morning, and got up at five o'clock. She did not know that because she had a different life, she came from Ireland. They were also Catholics but had a very different background. Studying was not part of their lives.'

The strength to study while also caring for a sick husband and her six children Margarete attributed to her faith and the church. 'It gave me strengths and helped me through everything.'

After graduation she took up a post teaching English, History, Geography and Religious Studies at a middle school in Rochdale, a job she held for many years. However, studying part time remained part of her life: 'And you know, once you have started to study you want to know more and achieve more. And then I did my BA, the Bachelor of Arts, and after that I did the Diploma [in Translation], English-German, German-English with the Institute of Linguists, with distinction.'

The offer of a teaching contract with the British branch of the German company in Manchester gave Margarete the opportunity to leave her full-time teaching post at the middle school and teach adults in the private sector. 'I have been there for 11 years now, I teach the employees every evening, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and one evening in another company which is also linked to Germany. They produce the electronic devices for oil platforms in the North Sea. Their headquarters are in Mannheim, and another one which produces drinking machines, game machines, cigarette machines with their headquarters in Hamburg. I have worked for six or seven years for this company and the chairperson is really good in German.'

Through her work as a catechist Margarete is still involved in teaching children. She runs courses on religious instruction for children and prepares them for first communion: 'This is for a few times every year for a few days. I get a lot of pleasure out of that, one gets to know the children and one has close contact with them, I really enjoy that.'

Margarete tried to teach her own children German and took them on holiday to Germany but admits that she was not completely successful. The three older children speak German, and the oldest is fluent having studied at a German university. Overall,

she is very happy with the educational achievements of her children: ‘I wanted them to study. I wanted them to have a good future. I saw the other children, they went into the factories and I thought, all your life in a factory, there must be something else. If I managed it, they have to manage. And they did. […] They knew that you have to work if you want to achieve anything. I had to work. I was lucky with my children, with all of them. They all felt that it is important to have an education. They all got their A-Levels. […] All my six children have graduated, I am really proud of them. The two eldest, the boys, one has now a Master of Arts in Education, the other one a degree in Business. Angela is a doctor, a lecturer at Manchester University, she’s very gifted in languages. Ulrike teaches English as a foreign language. Rita is Bachelor of Science. Shirley is in nursing and the youngest, my baby, went to America as an au-pair, […] and is now a lawyer. She concentrates on immigration law in Florida.’

Full of energy, professionally active and involved with the Catholic church, Margarete feels very much part of her community and regards England, where she has lived for nearly 50 years, as her home, although as she said many times, she only intended to stay for a short while in England. ‘I feel German, that is in me, that stems from my parents, because that is where my roots are, but now I have become more international, more European.’ Rochdale’s ethnic and cultural diversity certainly contributed to the fact that Margarete never saw herself as an outsider. ‘There were so many mixed couples in the neighbourhood, Ukrainian-Italian, Polish-Italian, German-English, German-Ukrainian, so many with a European background.’ At the same time, following Britain’s entry to the European Union and the demand for German in the business world, she was able to use her German language and cultural experiences professionally, thus linking aspects of her past with her present life.

Margarete is content with the course her life has taken and what she has achieved in Britain as a migrant, her one regret being that she wanted ‘to have studied much earlier’. And the main reason for her success she puts down to her ‘optimism, her ability to adjust and to be flexible’. She is very proud that she managed to raise a large family almost single-handedly and without social services support. ‘I have always worked and never became a burden to the state. I was too proud. In the days when my husband was so ill, I taught from home, took on sewing work, just to get by. I wouldn’t have gone to social services for money. No, far too proud. I take care of myself.’

She acknowledges that she would not have been able to fulfil her educational ambitions without the support she received from her local council: ‘I couldn’t have done what I did, if I didn’t receive this support from the state which enabled me to study. Without that scholarship I couldn’t have done it. England was good to me. In all those years England has been good.’

Hedwig Q.: I was the stupid one who stayed on.

Hedwig, one of four children, was born in 1925 in a small town in East Prussia not far from the Polish border. Here, she says, she spent a happy childhood—the best years of her life—until Germany attacked Poland. At the age of 14 she had to do the *Pflichtjahr,* a year in domestic service, which was compulsory for every German girl of that age during the Nazi era. Afterwards in 1941, rather than pursuing her dream of becoming an actress,

she went to *Berufsschule* [vocational school] and worked as an office apprentice for a well-established company in Königsberg that produced building materials. She was able to finish her three-year training before they were evacuated from East Prussia. With her father and older brother in the army, her mother and the three children had to leave by train, carrying only the bare necessities and their valuables. They expected to return soon. 'Mother said: "Leave the doors open, the German army will live in the houses", and we had the hope that we'd be back soon. We thought we just had to get out of the border area as we heard the rumbling and shooting already.'

They were sent to the countryside in Saxony where they worked on a farm helping a farmer's wife until the war was over. 'We were the refugees from the east and just worked for our living. In the summer of 1945 we were transported further to Thuringia, again to the countryside, as there was no work or food in the cities. This time we came to a large farm. My mother and I had to work in the fields. My sister was too weak for this, so she stayed at home cooking for everybody. We had to strew dung and cut sugar beets. We had nothing, there was nothing, no money, we didn't have a penny, worked for food and bed. And often the Russians came and looked for young girls and the older women hid us on the farm, in a small room and put a wardrobe before the door, so they couldn't find us. It was terrible, we were so nervous.'

Hedwig's father was still missing, but when they heard that her brother had survived and was safe in East Friesland in the British zone, mother and children moved west. They tried cutting peat in the moor land but were unable to continue when the autumn rains set in as they did not have suitable shoes. They regularly went to the job centre in the hope of finding work, but they were not the only ones. 'There were so many people, all the refugees from Breslau, Silesia, from Pommerania, from East Prussia and Poland, they all were there, and in East Friesland there was no industry, only agriculture and cattle.' After a period of unemployment, both girls eventually found jobs as kitchen hands in a British officers' mess.

Here they heard that the British government was advertising for workers in Britain. They saw this as a real opportunity and, with the permission of their mother, both applied and were accepted. They arrived in Britain in November 1949 expecting, as promised, 'a nice room and good work in a hospital'. Together with ten other German women, they started work in a tuberculosis hospital in West Yorkshire, initially on a women's ward. Whilst they liked their accommodation and each other's company in their free time, which they often spent walking in the Yorkshire countryside and talking about their families back in Germany, the work did not meet Hedwig's expectations. It became apparent that they were employed as cleaning staff, not nursing auxiliaries, and Hedwig also had the impression that everything was organised in a strictly hierarchical manner, with the German women being the 'lowest, like second class'. They had to take their meals in a side room, separated from the English staff whom they had to serve, and they had to do the most unpleasant tasks on the ward, such as collecting the patients spit in the mornings which made Hedwig feel sick.

She also remembers how embarrassed she was in the presence of the strict matron when there were language misunderstandings, and even the food was unfamiliar and thus a further difficulty to cope with. 'We had to eat beans with fatty bacon and fish, those kippers for breakfast, not fresh bread rolls with honey.' No wonder, 'at the beginning we couldn't get used to this and we cried a lot. We felt homesick. It was terrible.' Only when

the group applied to be transferred to a different hospital did the working conditions improve. They got more leisure time and even a bonus payment.

Life looked up for a while, particularly when Hedwig fell in love with Alf, a good looking young English nursing student: 'He was tall, blond, big blue eyes and eye-lashes like a woman, a really handsome man.' When their two-year contract was up, Hedwig's sister returned to Germany, but Hedwig stayed in England and married Alf. 'His parents did not approve of the marriage, the father was a Sergeant-Major in the army, and we came to England too early. It was the pain, he had lost two sons in the war and we were still very much hated.' In anticipation of this Alf introduced her to his parents as Austrian, and only revealed her true nationality when the first baby was born. In retrospect Hedwig thinks that starting the marriage with a lie was a sign of what was to come.

Following his father's wishes Alf continued his training in the army. After only a year at Aldershot he was posted to Germany for five years. Hedwig received nice letters in which he stated his love for her and the two babies and, on her arrival a comfortable flat with central heating and a fridge awaited them in Osnabrück. It was not to be a happy reunion. From the time of his family's arrival Alf withdrew from married life and his children, and requested permanent night shift at the army hospital. Alf told her that Germany had changed him, he hated living there and intended to quit the army. They would return to England, he said. An army neighbour explained what he thought was the reason for Alf's behaviour: 'And he said to me: "Your husband has not a girl friend, but there is a man, a Canadian official who always comes and visits."' A postcard and other clues she found proved the case, although she did not confront him. After Alf had resigned from the army Hedwig and the children were returned to England, but Alf did not follow. He vanished and was never traced. There were rumours that he moved to Canada with his lover, but this was never confirmed.

Army support was short-lived and Hedwig soon found herself solely responsible for herself and her daughters. She returned to hospital work and mainly worked night shift, which allowed her to care for the girls the larger part of the day. Still without a permanent home for the three of them Hedwig moved often, relying on acquaintances and friends for accommodation. After a lengthy bureaucratic battle with the authorities she was finally offered a council flat, initially still expecting her husband to return. Life on her own was difficult, although her brother, who worked as a steward on a boat, occasionally sent money which paid for some extras: 'I only earned £7 a week. The flat was not cheap, I had to pay for coal and light, the children needed two pennies each every morning, and I was not well.' Years of worry and shift work took a toll on Hedwig's health so that doctors advised her to give up night work due to her severe weight loss. At that stage an advert in the local newspaper caught her attention: 'It was a wool company which dealt with Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, and they were looking for a secretary with German who was able to type and use shorthand. I was not sure whether I could do it, it had been such a long time since I did this kind of work in Germany, and I was already 36-years-old, but I applied and got the job.'

The decision changed her situation dramatically: 'They were very nice. They travelled to Germany and I prepared everything for them, typed and telexed and they got good contracts.' Hedwig liked the work and started to feel better about life. Her personal life improved also. After years of depression and struggling as a single mother she met

Andres, a 'good modest man' from Latvia, who had been a soldier with the German army and worked in Germany until he was accepted as an EVW. If it had not been for Andres, Hedwig says, she would not have married again, as 'I didn't want to see another English man'. At the time she was actually toying with the idea of returning to Germany—'it would have been possible'. But instead Hedwig and Andres got married, bought a house and started the family life Hedwig had been longing for. Andres was a good father to the girls, who did well at school and got As in English and German in their A-level exams. Hedwig worked for the wool company another eight years until it was shut down and she had to look for a new job. Conveniently, a new hospital had opened in her neighbourhood and she was accepted for nursing training. She talks proudly about passing her nursing exams at the age of 45 and staying on until retirement. When she left there was 'a big party and many presents'. Then her mother came from Germany and lived with them for several years until she died.

Although Hedwig developed a good personal relationship with Alf's parents over the years, the first decade in England scarred Hedwig's general relationship with British people. She divides them into those 'who are OK and those she does not like' for their apparent lack of empathy for others and coldness: 'They don't want to hear that we were bombed out, that we have suffered. […] They don't have empathy, they are heartless and have no feelings.' In contrast she enjoys her multi-cultural neighbourhood: 'At the corner lives a Polish woman married to a Ukrainian, next is an Italian woman married with a Pole, then us, then an Irish couple, everything is mixed, opposite an English woman. And then the Pakistanis moved in, very good people, you can talk to them, very friendly. […] I am part of them as a former refugee.'

When Hedwig talks about her life there is some bitterness. She still thinks she made the wrong choice coming to Britain and staying when, 'my sister and the other girls returned to Germany, I was the stupid one who stayed on'. She compares her life with that of her sister, who on her return from England got a very good job as a secretary in the Ministry of Economics in Bonn and had a nice and comfortable flat at a time when she had to come to terms with the betrayal of her husband and was struggling to survive in a foreign country without support. 'If only mother had said no, I wouldn't have gone. But we were young. […] We expected to experience a better life than in Germany but it was bad. […] And if I hadn't met that English man, to be abandoned, alone with two children and being German. But I never complained to my mother, I kept quiet, they were not supposed to know.'

Paula Z.: My love for Dresden.

Paula was born in 1924 and grew up as the only child of a middle class family in the historic part of Dresden. Her father was a piano maker and also had a shop selling pianos and other musical instruments. Her mother helped out in households, mainly Jewish families. Then, her father's business was severely hit by the worldwide economic crisis of the late 1920s. Paula remembers as a child looking down from the bay window of their flat: 'Men of all ages hang around from early morning to late at night. I see these unemployed men in the doorways, an every-day sight.' Despite the crash and her parents' early divorce she talks about a very happy childhood shaped by classical music, the opera

and ballet, and by being surrounded by the historical buildings of Dresden. A friend and ballet partner actually lived in a flat in the castle grounds. ‘These were wonderful times, even as a child I was able to go to the opera, sometimes two or three times per week. Our playground was the *Zwinger,* there was enough room for us children to roam about, as we did not have a garden. It was simply heavenly.’

Paula initially attended a girls’ grammar school, but had to leave when her scholarship was terminated. She finished school at the age of 15, just when the war began. Then she was able to attend a commercial college and was later conscripted into a civil air defence unit. She has a very vivid and personal memory of 13 February 1945, the night Dresden was bombed:

‘I came home, my mum was sewing rucksacks because we had refugees from Breslau in our flat who warned us to be ready as they themselves had no time to pack their belongings when they had to leave home. I was hardly in bed when the warnings came through: “Attention! Attention!” I knew immediately that it was us. Five minutes later the sirens started. Normally we didn’t really bother when the alarm went off but this time it was different. Everything happened so quickly, we could already see the Christmas trees, the light and it was the attack. My god! We lived in a four-storey block near to the Elbe. The first attack lasted for about half an hour and it was around 10 o’clock, it was still just bearable, our house remained undamaged. Of course, all windows were broken and things were damaged but the house still stood. […]

We then started clearing up when this firestorm came in such a speed, we went out until the Elbe shores which was only 50–100 metres away from us and there it was already crowded with people who had left their burning houses with the belongings they could save. They were somehow trying to settle along the Elbe meadows. It was sheer madness how the fire caused by the storm spread from house to house.

We then returned to our house and as I was the youngest, so I had to do fire watch on the roof. And there I was, all by myself, I will never forget that. It was like watching the inferno, so many roofs around me burning, how quickly they burned. […] About two o’clock in the morning they announced the second attack of that night which was very strange anyway. But we just made it downstairs when the terrible heavy detonations came. Really, this was as though the world came to an end. We had probably spent about three quarters of an hour in the cellar and really with every explosion we thought we were going to die. We heard every arrival of these bombs and those terrible detonations, some cried with fear, we prayed, we thought, really, on the second attack this night we were finished. Then strangely, it was quiet and after a while, and then suddenly came the sound of the hissing fire and that was on our staircase to the cellar, everything started burning and panic broke out.

We had these openings in the walls between the houses and people from left and right, many more people came into our cellar. Nobody was able to get out, we were all trapped as the openings were blocked from the detonations, damaged or unsafe to pass. The panic which prevailed in our cellar—normally we were 16 people, now there were perhaps 80—it was like a mad house. Then we heard a very clear voice: “Stay calm, we’ll get you all out. Just wait and stay calm.” This man was an air raid warden, it came like a miracle, these people down there, mad with fear, screaming and shocked, but this voice had such a… I will not forget. And god knows, he returned shortly after and told us that he had found an opening, we should follow him five houses further, there was an exit. […]

Outside, in the street fire came down like snow. When you entered the street everything caught fire, the hair, the clothes, the phosphor, you got stuck with your feet in the street. The wind howled as in a snowstorm but it was fire. […] And then on the Elbe meadows, where we had been before, and some people did not return to the shelters in the cellars, the meadows were a field covered with dead bodies, I cannot forget that. Some burning people jumped into the ice-cold water, into the river to rid themselves of the flames, simply terrible. […] We ran and ran, only bomb-holes, human remains, the wounded, a battlefield, gruesome.'

Paula continues to talk about her flight out of Dresden towards the Czech border. She was walking along a country road together with thousands of others, trying to get as far away as possible from the city, when they suffered more attacks from low-flying aircraft. After finding shelter with relatives near the Czech border, Paula and her mother returned to Dresden a week later when some trains started running again. They wanted to find out what had happened to friends and family, wanted to see whether any of their possessions could be rescued from their house.

What follows is her personal account of entering Dresden after the ferocious firestorms: 'Bodies were daily carried out of the cellars, piled up at the end of the road, powdered with white chlorine to prevent epidemics. […] Soldiers were crying like little children. Well, daily we would see these little horse-drawn carriages, filled with bodies or pieces, they were taken to the crematorium at the Altmarkt, endlessly. Prisoners of war had to do this work. I think they could only do it with alcohol. These images stay: innocent people, civilians, nothing to do with politics, small children in their carnival dresses, all those foreign labourers, all in piles together.'

In the end they did not stay long in Dresden before leaving again for the countryside. They returned sometime later for a short while, only to flee again when the Russians crossed the Elbe. Mother and daughter made their way to Chemnitz in a daring journey, despite curfews and blockades imposed by the Americans and a severe shortage of food. Five weeks later they arrived in the medieval town of Göttingen which had been spared major bombing. They found accommodation, even though the town was filled with refugees and everything appeared to be in chaos. Paula found a job helping organise and run a cash free exchange market, a self-help initiative since money was worthless. Food remained a problem for them throughout this period until she heard that jobs were available for Germans with the British Military Government. These were sought after, partly because of the access they gave to food.

Paula was interviewed by a major and given a job in the Search Bureau for Missing People that collaborated with the Red Cross. She recalls: 'Initially I was very distant, he was the first British person I met. He was a wonderful man, this major, so friendly, and for me it was so strange to speak to a foreigner, an ex-enemy. He explained that British non-army men would come to Germany soon. And one of the first to arrive was my future husband. […] It was wonderful, to start with, we had bread again, which was white bread, which I had never seen in my entire life. We thought it was cake. And we had plenty, I didn't even use my ration card and left it for my mother.'

Paula and Jack got married in 1948, and she received her British citizenship. At the ceremony she was advised by the local registrar 'never to forget her Germanness', which according to her, she never did. With the onset of the Berlin crisis her husband was asked to return to England having been away for ten years.

They both arrived in Britain in 1950. Paula was given a warm welcome by Jack's parents, but both of them found it difficult to adjust to life in London. Travel in London was expensive and rents were high. Language problems prevented her from getting office work, and as a British citizen she was not eligible for the government's work schemes. Her husband had to completely re-orientate himself to civilian life after being demobbed, and started in an office job at the Savoy Hotel. After a disastrous experience serving tea in a Lyon's tea shop on Oxford Street, Paula managed to find work in a private house as housekeeper, although she despised house work. Her employer was an affluent and very cultured, music-loving dentist in Hampstead, North London, who also provided the couple with a small flat near by. Living there, she met several other young German women who were in similar jobs as housekeepers, au-pairs or nannies, and they enjoyed swapping stories about their employers and the interesting lifestyles they saw. Even though she did not belong to that strata of society, she was happy and felt very much at home in the cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Realising this could not go on forever, the couple decided to buy their own home, and with the arrival of their first baby were forced to lead a more modest life in a less exciting part of North London. This move brought her into closer contact with British working class people, their beliefs and lifestyles. Paula commented critically on the class divisions, the lack of culture amongst working class people, and the limited aspirations held by the parents of her child's classmates. She particularly noticed a general lack of interest in music, an area her son was able to develop by playing the organ at the local church.

In retrospect Paula believes that only the political circumstances brought her to Britain. Her life was turned upside down and she had to put down new roots somewhere. 'But', she says, 'I would advise anybody to think very carefully before leaving their own country. One also marries into a new family, and it is important to know what circle that is, what kind of interests they have. I came from such a different home. My husband was a very generous person but he loved dog and horse racing, completely alien worlds to me. I think people have to work too hard in this country to spend so much money on these kind of things, but maybe I am too German in this respect.'

Despite the death of her husband she continues to lead an active life. For decades she was angry about the negative way Germany was depicted in the British media, and nowadays she responds with letters to the editor. She feels it her mission to help bring about a balanced portrayal of Germany and—as a witness of the Dresden bombing—she has appeared in several British television programmes. Work for the Dresden Trust, which supported the rebuilding of the *Frauenkirche* cathedral as a symbol of German-British reconciliation, keeps her busy and enables her to travel in an official capacity to her much-loved former home town.

Erwin S.: Conscious of being German.

Erwin was born in 1925 and grew up in Dresden. After finishing school he completed a three-year apprenticeship and obtained a qualification in business and commerce from Auto Union, a big car producer. He then set his sights on getting a diploma of commerce and started attending an evening course at a local college that was cut short when he was

conscripted into the army. He trained with the Luftwaffe as pilot and parachutist, and when barely older than those in his command, was put in charge of a group of 30 soldiers aged between 17 and 18. Unlike other male interviewees Erwin did not talk much about his war experiences. He merely stated that he and some of the soldiers in his group were captured and sent to England as prisoners of war.

His narrative focusses on his time in England. As a POW he was interned in a camp in Yorkshire and initially sent out to work on road building. During this period he met Joan, his future wife, whom he married at the end of his time as POW. Erwin tells the story of how they made contact:

'I always sat in front of the lorry with the driver because I had to fill in the timesheets and we had about 35 prisoners in the back of the lorry. And in the evening the driver always stopped in front of the same shop to buy something, and I had to stay in the lorry to keep an eye on the other prisoners. And there I noticed that one of the two young shop assistants was smiling at me, but I was not allowed to leave the lorry. After about three or four months I asked the driver if he could pass on a letter to the girl. I explained that I was trying to learn English and whether she would help me. So our correspondence lasted for about six months. And she always used to send something with it, cigarettes or bread or cocoa. And it is important to understand that everything was rationed, it wasn't easy. But I was nearly the richest man in the whole camp. In the evenings we shared everything, we mixed the cocoa with sugar and condensed milk and put it on the bread. We were always hungry. And sometime she came to the camp. She could not come in as it was surrounded by barbed wire, but we waved at each other. And then I started to go through the wire. We made a small hole in it and I was able to escape for an hour or so without being noticed and so we got to know each other a little bit better'.

The Christmas of 1946, POWs were granted permission to leave the camp for a few hours, if invited by one of the local population. 'Particularly the prisoners who worked on farms had made good friends with their farmers, and they went there for Christmas lunch. I went to Joan's family. All 120 POWs of our camp were invited by the local people for lunch. Nobody would have thought that all of us would be invited because the newspapers were still full of propaganda at the time and you noticed it still. Between 1946 and 1948 when I went to visit Joan, went up the steep streets of Bradford to reach the terraced house the family lived in, you noticed, I was in my POW uniform with those big yellow patches on it, I always saw them watching behind the curtains. And they looked at me and sometimes they said something, but mostly they were friendly.'

In 1948, the couple married, but not without a stern warning from the Justice of Peace that Joan would lose her British citizenship if she went ahead. As this was one of the first weddings between a POW and a British woman in the area, the church was packed with onlookers. 'Many people thought that Germans had horns on their heads. And of course I had to be back in camp in the evening, but my camp comrades helped me to stay away so I had a proper wedding night.'

Erwin was welcomed by Joan's family. Only her brother-in-law, who had served in the British forces during the war, voiced scepticism, and Joan's mother, though supportive of her daughter's decision, warned that it 'would not be an easy life'. When Joan was severely attacked by a stranger one night when walking home by herself they all thought 'it was one of those people who did not like it that she had chosen to be with a POW'.

Indeed, their life together did not have an easy start. Even though he was a newly married man, Erwin recalls how limited his prospects were when he was released: 'There I was in front of the camp, no belongings, nothing apart from my dirty uniform, half a crown in my pocket, just enough for the bus fare from Selby to Bradford. What do you do now? We were so cheated in this war; my brother died in Russia.'

Married life started with the in-laws, who gave them a bedroom in their terraced house, and Erwin tried to find work. This turned out to be more difficult than they had anticipated. On one occasion he applied for a job with English Electric, a big company that was looking for unskilled labourers. 'I went there and when I told the interviewer where I came from he said: "Are you not able to read? It says clearly *English* Electric, we do not employ anybody from Germany." I was never asked what I was capable of doing.' Erwin realised that he had no chance of getting work in his field so he took a job as a floor layer with a large company. 'I was qualified to do office work and couldn't put a nail into the wall, but one had to change and I was interested. First we laid the old-fashioned parquet floors, wood, then rubber floors, cork, vinyl and plastic floors.' He worked in hospitals, schools and other public buildings. Unfortunately, this kind of work also meant staying away from the family for long periods: 'I had to go to Glasgow, Sheffield or Newcastle. The contract in Newcastle lasted for nine months, and I only came home every other weekend. I was not much around when my son grew up. The work was piecework'.

In the meantime Erwin's and Joan's hard work enabled them to buy a small house, with the help of the German pastor who vouched for their mortgage. Erwin recalled an incident in the mid-1950s when a German supplier, who valued the quality of his work, encouraged him to return to Germany where his newly developed skills would be useful. Erwin and Joan did not seriously consider this, mainly because they felt their lives had become more stable by then and their son was well settled in his local school.

A somewhat introverted person, Erwin obviously continued to feel an outsider. He says that he did not feel comfortable for a long time because life in Britain undermined his traditional role as an active and decisive man. 'One had to get used to the new life, and my wife did everything, she always had to show me what to do, new laws and so on. As a man I always had to ask my wife. She knew it, because she was born here. She did things that men are supposed to do.' At this point Joan, who has listened quietly up until now, interjects, commenting that she is still carrying out this role: 'If there is anything to do or any telephoning or anything like that, he won't do it.'

It appears Erwin became a more timid and cautious person, and particularly sensitive with respect to his nationality: 'One had to be careful as a German in certain situations. When it came to an argument, for example, when the neighbour's dog came into our garden and I chased it away, our neighbour said in leaving "What do you expect from a German?" […] When there were any conflicts I always left it to you [addressing Joan] to sort it out.' His wife is convinced that it is because 'he has this consciousness that he is German'.

Even though Erwin claims not to have been personally involved in any war crimes, he identifies strongly with the German guilt. There were many instances when he suffered and felt uncomfortable, particularly in the immediate post-war years. 'That was when I started smoking. I started when I began working in the building trade, every lunch time we all sat there and smoked our Woodbines. And the Holocaust pictures, after the war

every film in the cinema was about the war. And the Germans were always the stupid ones, and when they shot they were the criminals and when the English shot they were always the good ones. And when you came to work the next day after a Holocaust film, there was always silence when I joined. Most likely they talked about it before I came, I noticed it. Always after a film on TV the atmosphere wasn't good. Or when we visited some friends for tea, which used to be the fashion, and we watched TV, the atmosphere always changed, if we were present.'

Joan too felt the stigma that was attached to being German. She remembers: 'You know, I got it at work, marrying a German, what do you think about that, you know you shouldn't be marrying a German. And when I went for a job interview, they'd ask me, the name, what it was. What nationality? As soon as you said German, that was it. […] In fact, quite honestly, let's face it, it is no good glossing over it, but it is still there. It has changed but it is still there now. German is a kind of dirty word. […] To be German is awful.'

Erwin remembers the offer he had in the mid-1950s from the German contractor to return. 'Today, I wished we had gone. We would have had a better life, more pension, we don't live well here on our small pensions. We only get £112 per week, my wife and I. That is not much if you have to pay your taxes, council tax, water, electricity and gas.'

Although Erwin thinks it may have been a mistake not to return to Germany, he felt more valued in England when the German image started to improve as a consequence of the German economic recovery. 'Then I felt that in my own work, many people in the building trade talked to me about German quality, and people asked me particularly to carry out some jobs because I was German and Germans were good workers.' Comparing the two countries he also sees other positive things in Britain: 'Life is so much more quiet here, also politically, because England has been a democratic country for centuries and they always find a compromise here. In Germany you have the extremes, so many different ideologies, Weimar Republic, Nazis and Communism in the East.' And had he returned he would have missed the British sense of humour and his favourite game—cricket.

Jean Z.: A love affair.

Jean is the Scottish widow of Karl, a German POW who died in 1977 at the age of 55. She talks about how she met her husband and the life they spent together. 'My husband comes from a well-to-do family. I would say he comes from a middle-class family. I came from a not very well-off family, which is just as well because when I got married to my husband, we had very little money. So I was able to manage. I was born into a mining community—coal mining—and my family come from generations, literally hundreds of years, of mining families. Whereas the other half were farmers, a bit mixed in a way. But they were all very strong characters. But my husband's family, they were more professional. His grandfather was a headmaster, his father was a teacher, and his uncle was a teacher as well. His cousins were engineers in Dresden. And I was at the local grammar school when I met my husband, by chance actually, by mistake because I did not have any intention of meeting him.

I had an aunt and an uncle who lived in the country, and it was my uncle's duty to go to the camp and invite any of the prisoners if they would like to come out and work. They got paid a few shillings. And my husband said, of course, and took the chance immediately. They came out because of being bored behind bars. […] By this time the war had finished, they could come out of course if they wanted. But in the beginning they could only go and see a 5-mile radius. And of course they were obvious by their POW uniforms which had big patches on them. So my uncle Bob, who had been a veteran from the battle of the Somme from the First World War, and he had wounds which he had all his life. And my aunt was a war widow. She had lost her husband at the beginning of the war, 1940. He was in the merchant navy and was blown up in his boat by a German submarine. So these two people were very unlikely people to be entertaining German soldiers. But my uncle Bob used to say to me, the German fighting man is one of the finest in the world, and must be treated with respect. That was his feeling. […] So he would go down to the camp, get these men, and at the end of the week he would say to them, now lads, you must come and have tea with my wife and I on Sunday, if you want. So my husband came to the house. […] And anyway we had a meal and I tried to be nice, you know. But I could not forgive them for what they had done. And you know I don't know why I was behaving like this, except that, I suppose we had been fed a lot of propaganda during the war. […] And when he left, I thought, oh well, thank goodness, that's over.'

Later, Jean received a letter from Karl inviting her to join a church event with the POWs in St Gilles. 'And he thought I would be interested. I was brought up to go to church. My family were devoted Presbyterians you know. So I went. And all the citizens were sitting down one side of the cathedral. And suddenly, all these army lorries came and disgorged all these men. And they sat down on the other side. We did not mix. So that was fine, that suited me. And I looked across and saw the young man who had invited me. This will patch things up I thought, you know, makes me feel better. So, after the ceremonies, we went outside… And the guards, they came with guards, you know, […] all the citizens shook hands with the prisoners of war. Many of these citizens were people who had business in Germany previously, perhaps schoolteachers and that sort of thing. So, I shook hands and said goodbye, I said I hope you have a safe journey. He said, oh, I am not going back to Germany. I said, you aren't? He said, no, I have changed my mind. So anyway, I did not see why he changed his mind or anything.'

Karl did not return to Germany. He stayed on, found himself a job on a farm, and wrote to Jean regularly. They became friends and Jean was often invited to have Sunday lunch with Karl and the farmer's family. 'And I had to admit that he was a nice lad. So, things went on along like this. I was a correspondent really. And then the announcement came that British families could write to the officer in charge of the camp. And they said, British families can write to the officers commanding and offer to take one of the prisoners as a guest over Christmas. So I said to mother do you think we could do this? She said, oh, I don't know. Anyway, she must have spoken with my father, who allowed her to do anything she wanted. And I was allowed to write. So he came to our home and he was very polite. My parents liked him. My father liked him even. You know, he said, he is a nice lad. Very fine. And so the thing went on. And then we decided we would get engaged. My mother was a little bit worried, father was against it. And it went on and on until finally my mother said, very well then, if this is what you want to do, you make

your bed, you lie on it. We have nothing against Karl. He is a very fine boy, he is nice, we like him. But you are too young. And I said, well mother, I don't care. I am going to do it. The only person who really supported me was my grandmother. So we got married in September 1948,1 was 17, Karl was 25. In the end we had two ministers: our minister, the Reverend Edward Jack, and we also had the German pastor. So for the first time, we had two wedding rings. And it was lovely. The German pastor wrote a detailed letter to my parents-in-law in Germany describing all the proceedings. And I had made my bridesmaid's dresses and he wrote to her: […] She can cook, don't worry, they are very happy etc. He wrote this very nice letter. We were very happy. And my friends here, they said, of course you know Jean, yours was a love affair. And it is true, it was a love affair. We never had any, I am not saying we did not quarrel, we did, but it wasn't anything serious. […] But it was very sad that he died so soon. My youngest child was nine, then 14, 17 and the eldest girl was 22. This was a terrible pity. But you know, and I feel it was wonderful to have the years that we had. […]

Most of the German men I know have done well. They have worked hard. I can't think of any who haven't done well in the field. And the children have done well. And I have a feeling that the German POWs were instrumental in bringing Christmas to Scotland. Because Christmas was not very much celebrated here. Would you believe, I never had a Christmas tree until the very first year I was married. Now, we lived with my grandmother at the time and we did not have a home of our own in the beginning. Grandmother lived alone in her house. So on that Christmas Eve I was working. And I went home. And Granny was in the sitting room, living room, and she said to me, you are not to go in there. We are to stay here, Karl says. So anyway, I waited and waited and then there was this tree, not very big, in the corner, lit with candles, sweets and nuts, all sorts of things. I was absolutely astounded. I had never seen anything like this in my life. Not even in our church, because Christmas trees were not allowed in the church. So strict were they, Calvinists you know. I had never seen anything like it. And the candlelight. And I just happened to look at my grandmother, and I am not joking, tears were running down her face. She said, You know Jean, I have never seen anything so beautiful in my life. So all over Scotland, I am very sure, in the other families, where the daughter of the house had married a German prisoner, they were having the same experience. And of course, you bring up your children to know this. […] I think that in the beginning the German prisoners had an influence on this. They introduced it and it was taken up.

In the beginning we lived with my grandmother. She was a widow and she had room. Because the housing situation was very difficult. All our men coming home. One of the things I maybe did not mention yet—I would not like you to think that it was a bed of roses. It was very difficult for some people to accept that this girl had married a German prisoner. I think it was just a little bit of resentment perhaps on the part of our own men. You know, naturally, they had been away fighting, they come back to find out the girls are marrying. I don't think there were more German ladies married to British soldiers, definitely, than the opposite. We are in the minority.

When we were first married, he had the intention of going back to Germany. Not maybe in the first year, but we could see a time when we might. And I said to Karl, well, I said, I am sure that I could. I started to learn German. And I said to Karl, well, I am prepared to go, if you want. And he said, well, we have to wait until things settle down in

Germany. We could not go now. And he said, not only that, he said, I am not going to Germany as long as the Russians are occupying our part of the country.

And I was waiting to start my training as a children's nurse. I had to wait until I was 19. So I was working in an office at the Westend in the meantime. And the men there, the office was one where they have the printing shop upstairs. […] And the men in the printing room, they never gave me one minute of peace. They were dreadful. I never used to go up. They were forever teasing me [about Karl]. I thought to myself, they are just a pain in the neck. Of course I think they were just a bit resentful. They, well only one was married and the others were bachelors. And I think they were a bit annoyed.

Karl was very keen to go to Canada. And I thought fine, you see, we hadn't been long married and because I had all this niggling and teasing…. You know Karl did not have such a very good job and I saw difficulties for him here and people were niggling me, people I worked with. And I wondered if it would be a good idea to try our lot. So we decided to go. It was really just because we were young. Wanted to try our luck. It wasn't—you see our men had come home from the army and—it wasn't so easy to get a job here. And the salaries were not very great at that time in Britain. Let's face it, we were also suffering from the post-war problems. I mean, the late 1940s and early 1950s were difficult for the people. Rationing was still in operation. Coal was rationed, food was rationed, potatoes. It really was awful. And when we got to Canada, the first thing we did was we walked along a street and I said, oh, look at that Karl, they've got bananas in that shop. So we went in and I said to the man, oh, I see you've got bananas in the shop, how many bananas can I have? And he said, you can have as many as you want. So we bought a bunch of bananas and I ate it all. I hadn't seen a banana since I was a little girl, everything was rationed here.'

After three-and-a-half years Jean and Karl returned. 'We enjoyed the experience in Canada. It opened our eyes and rounded our outlook and we made nice friends. But this is a more stable country in many ways. We wanted to educate our children. We did not want them to be brought up to be labourers or things like that. And you need a lot of money to support children through university and college. And this country would help if you couldn't do it. My husband, being the person he was, he just suited me down to the ground. Because I always had aspirations for my children and he went along with this. We wanted them to be broadminded and educated. We, I must say, we were both generally of one mind. We had our children and they were very much our life. So we had four. And they were our life. Karl was very much a family man.

Karl said to me, Scotland is my home. He said, you know, Scotland has given me everything I need. My wife, my children, my job. And that's my home. And I said, what you mean is Karl, we have a perfect saying, "home is where the heart is". He said, that's right. I think you leave your parent's home forever and however much you love your parents, your life is with your own family. The children that you have, your wife. And that doesn't have to be in a certain place. It can be wherever you are happy. And I thought, one day, because my husband expressed the view that if he ever died or was killed prematurely, that he would like to be buried. And I bought this piece of ground in the cemetery. I bought a stone, a headstone, and I put his name on it. I put, *Born in Germany, but died in Scotland, his second home.* Because I thought, this is nice'.

Summary

Between 1945 and 1951, almost a million people migrated to Britain. This figure comprised British subjects from the colonies and the Commonwealth, the Irish, workers from Europe who came on individual labour permits, EVWs as well as German, Austrian and Italian women recruited en masse under schemes sponsored by the British government. Italian, German and Ukrainian POWs (the latter former members of the Waffen SS) who were allowed to remain in Britain are also included in this figure. Germans and ethnic Germans made up around 60,000 of the migrants, of which consisted of more than 15,000 ex-POWs, over 20,000 commercially or privately recruited female workers and nearly 10,000 women recruited under government schemes. There were also some 1,300 ethnic Germans and around the same number of Sudeten Germans and about 10,000 war brides.

British immigration policy

Britain's immigration policy during this period was driven by the high war debt, an enormous demand for US dollars and extensive international aid commitments. Having decided the best way to meet these financial obligations was to bolster traditional export-orientated industries (textiles, coal, iron and steel) and support industries suffering labour shortages by recruiting foreign labour, the government needed to grant labour permits more generously than in the past. It also introduced sponsored recruitment programmes in Europe. In terms of the history of British immigration policy, this was quite a departure.

At the time the government embarked on this policy there were already a large number of German POWs working in Britain, particularly in the agriculture and building sectors. This generated a vehement public debate about *slaves* and *forced labour* that involved the newspapers, churches, voluntary organisations, Members of Parliament and various individuals. In August 1946, the number of working German POWs peaked at 362,000. It was only later, in 1947, that the first inter-ministerial talks on the possible retention of German POWs in Britain began.

The ministries concerned held a range of conflicting views and agendas, but finally the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, acting for the farmers, prevailed. The latter wanted to keep their POWs, who they felt had been accepted by their rural communities, and who they certainly did not want to exchange for unknown DPs. The agricultural unions needed to be persuaded first. Eventually the unions did agree to the permanent settlement of ex-POWs in Britain, on the condition that formal work contracts between them and their employers should be signed during 1948 and that they committed to staying in agriculture for several years. With this the unions ensured that ex-POWs did not compete directly with British land workers, since the former mostly lived and worked on remote farms that were avoided by the locals.

The government recruited DPs under the Balt Cygnet and Westward Ho schemes. These programmes were motivated by pragmatic rather than humanitarian concerns, that is, the serious shortage of male and female workers in certain sectors of British industry. Because of the acute shortage of accommodation at the time, the government ideally wanted workers who were single and independent. Furthermore, the political decision to accept EVWs was, in effect, also a decision to discourage the immigration of non-white British subjects from the dominions and colonies. Also, within those classed as DPs, workers from northern Europe were to receive preferential treatment. The ethno-political criteria were based on the premise that migrants from Europe would be more skilled and easier to assimilate than non-Europeans. Just prior to the government launching the Balt Cygnet and Westward Ho programmes, representatives at the 1946 TUC in Brighton had come out strongly against members of the allied Polish army remaining in Britain. The discussions about recruiting and employing DPs that followed a few months later were slightly less emotional, but unions in the agricultural and mining sectors still delayed accepting the relevant industrial agreements for several months.

Also during this period the government spent considerable effort getting the trade unions to agree to recruiting young, unmarried German and ethnic German women for the textile industry. This became a priority when it became clear during 1948 that there were not enough female DPs to meet the demand for workers in this sector. In Lancashire and West Yorkshire, the unions banned the employment of German women, but they were prepared to compromise on ethnic Germans of both sexes. They also agreed to the employment of Sudeten German women in Lancashire's cotton mills. A bilateral agreement with the USA was required before the government could start recruiting in Germany's American zone. This raised the issue of the Sudeten Germans' citizenship. During the negotiations the Americans refused to grant the women separate identity documents, and finally the British government had to agree to allow the migrants into Britain on German identity documents. The trade unions accepted this, but the British public was not informed.

The EVWs recruited under Westward Ho, the ethnic Germans, the Sudeten Germans and the ex-POWs received unrestricted work and residency permits, while the nearly 10,000 German women recruited under the North Sea scheme to work in the health system and hardship households only received work permits for a maximum of 2 or 3 years. As with the EVWs and other foreign workers, they filled gaps in the British labour market and took on work that was unattractive to the local workforce. It was this and the initially restricted work permits that explains the lack of trade union opposition and public protest to the programmes. What is remarkable, however, are the voices heard during the political decision-making process insisting that Germans would be more easily assimilated than DPs. Such positive discrimination only a few years after the war is surprising.

British immigrant policy

A cornerstone of the thinking underlying this aspect of British immigrant policy was that government responsibility for the recruits should not end with their arrival in Britain. A lot of effort went into deciding how best to support their assimilation. Part of the solution

was comprehensively informing the migrants about living and working conditions in Britain, and on the other hand, also informing the British public on the vital role the recruits would play in the country's economic recovery and growth. The pamphlets *To Help You Settle in Britain* and *Contemporary Life in Britain* were aimed directly at the newly recruited, while the brochure *Workers from Abroad* was designed for the British population. The latter was an important part of a government programme titled *Education of Popular Opinion on Foreign Workers* which aimed to reduce prejudice, stereotyping and xenophobia. The government also took on responsibility for providing the migrants' basic necessities during their initial period in Britain, along with language courses and an introduction to the British way of life. It was recognised that assimilation was a long-term process in which both sides—the host society and the migrants—had to be involved.

To aid the process of assimilation, the government was keen to enlist the support of local authorities, employers, unions, churches and voluntary organisations. The aim was to reduce friction between locals and foreigners at work and in the community by providing the personal support that would equip them to take their place as equal members of society. Segregation had to be avoided, and it was for this reason the Ministry of Labour generally favoured using existing welfare structures rather than making separate arrangements for the migrants. It was thus the Ministry's local and regional welfare officers who investigated the EVWs' working conditions and accommodation. They also investigated complaints, and put migrants in touch with local clubs, churches and other organisations. Local authorities got involved by inviting foreign workers to welcome parties and opening advisory bureaus. Public libraries provided books and newspapers in foreign languages. Larger firms usually employed welfare officers specifically to look after the migrants.

Some special provisions were made. The Cotton Board, for example, employed a female welfare officer specifically to take care of the European workers, and between June 1950 and October 1951, the Ministry of Labour retained German sociologist, Maria Roos, as their Advisory Welfare Officer for German Women.

At the government's behest, churches and NGOs across the country also provided welfare support to the migrants within their local communities during the early months and years. Members visited nearby camps and hostels and invited the foreign workers to join their activities. Some even provided language courses. The most active organisation was the WVS, whose members met migrants off the boats and escorted them to their lodgings. With such activities, the WVS's local branches played an essential role in helping the migrants' settle in. Overall the NGOs played a fairly limited part in proceedings, and members were often disappointed by the workers' lack of enthusiasm or outright rejection of their efforts. Language courses offered by the government and local institutions received a similarly cool response. The main reasons for the widespread apathy were considered to be the heavy workloads most foreign workers had to shoulder and the fact that they preferred to spend their limited leisure time with their fellow compatriots. Early on this led to the establishment of ethnic clubs where workers could maintain their eastern European culture.

The German migrants were an exception to this pattern, as they rarely organised groups or regular meetings that were not church related. The German YMCA in London, founded in 1860, re-emerged at the end of the war and became an important focal point for migrants of both sexes. Also, the Freiburg-based German National Federation of

Catholic Associations for the Protection of Young Women financed a UK-based social worker who was active for a number of years. She was initially based in Rochdale between October 1950 and February 1952, before moving to London to take charge of St Lioba House, which was also run by the Federation. Finally, the activities of the German Welfare Council, formed in 1952, also deserve a mention, as do those of the various Catholic and Protestant churches, which have a history of pastoral care and social work within the German migrant community that goes back to well before the First World War.

First impressions

The migrants' first experiences of life in Britain, and their opportunities to meet and mix socially with British people, were largely dictated by the sort of work they did. Ex-POWs slowly became integrated into their local communities. Occasionally close contacts had been made with locals prior to the strict ban on fraternisation being lifted, and contact of this type accelerated once they left the camps and were billeted on farms. Of note here is the fact that just under 800 German POWs married British women while they were still interned. Together with a certain empathy for the underdog on the part of local people, the settling-in process was made a little easier for these men by the fact that they only worked in areas where they did not compete with local workers. In terms of accommodation the same was true, which again must have played a part in reducing existing prejudices. This situation only changed when work restrictions were officially removed. The loss of home and social networks, and an unwillingness to return to areas under Soviet occupation were among the key reasons migrants chose to stay in Britain, although the number of workers from West Germany is actually bigger than has hitherto been assumed.

In contrast to the POWs, the approximately 10,000 German war brides had an entirely different experience. When they met, their future husbands were either soldiers or members of the British Control Commission. Contemporary sources reported comprehensively on the many unhappy marriages, which were generally the result of high expectations that for a variety of reasons could not be fulfilled in Britain. But on the whole British partners and their families did help these women find a place in British society.

Within the group of German migrants there are clear differences in the marriage partners they chose, differences which seem to originate in the type of work they went into. Women recruited for the health system were more likely to marry a British partner, whereas those working as domestics and in the textile industry tended to marry other foreigners. The social status of a particular job, and the opportunities this offered for making contact with the opposite sex, are likely explanations. The differences in role expectations once married are also strikingly different, and this seemed to depend on the choice of partner. Those who married a British man often gave up their jobs regardless of their qualifications (or at least gave up working full time), whereas women who married eastern Europeans had, together with their husbands, set themselves such ambitious material goals that both partners had to work.

The reasons the recruited women came to Britain were similar to the reasons given by those who came on individual work permits—usually the loss of home and social networks. Other factors were traumatic experiences during wartime, being a refugee, suffering discrimination in West Germany, struggling to get work and some degree of material and emotional security, and the anticipation of better career and social opportunities. For some there was the sense of adventure, or the prospect of finding a husband. There were also those who wanted to reduce the burden on their family by supporting them from abroad, while others left because they had no chance of finding work in Germany due to their activities during the NS era. This last group had no difficulty immigrating, as security checks were not strictly applied.

On their arrival, the migrants went to a variety of working and living environments. Although working in the health sector had enormous health risks associated with it (e.g. TB sanatoria), the responsibility that came with the job and the opportunity to work in a mainly female workplace (and staff that was likely to include other German nurses) attracted many recruits. In contrast, those who worked as domestics in hardship households were often very isolated and experienced high levels of homesickness. The Sudeten German women who went to work in the Lancashire cotton mills also found themselves in a totally alien living and working environment. In addition, they suffered more racial harassment from their colleagues than their counterparts in the health sector who were largely protected by their superiors. A number of these Sudeten Germans left the textile factories before the end of their contracts, others used the cotton crisis of 1952 to make a professional or geographical change.

Settling in

After marriage, what for most ex-POWs and female workers had been a limited stay turned into a permanent one. Like the eastern European migrants, in material terms they began with nothing. Most of them managed to establish themselves, became home owners and created a modest lifestyle without any outside help. A strong drive to get out of what were initially often unacceptable living conditions was particularly noticeable amongst the recruited women. Many managed to buy a small house after only a few years in Britain, which was only possible through hard work and a frugal lifestyle. They look back proudly, sometimes with a little arrogance, on their achievements and are quick to point out that they made it on their own without becoming a social burden to society.

In retrospect, most ex-POWs defined themselves through their work, even if despite having worked hard physically all their lives they rarely managed to achieve a senior or influential position. Some became self-employed, but the majority felt their nationality had prevented them from achieving more. The majority of recruited women were equally marked by years of hard work. In addition, they usually had sole responsibility for organising the household and bringing up children. Throughout the initially difficult years in Britain, they managed by relying on virtues learned during and after the war in Germany: economising and doing without. Like the men, they saw their lives as having been difficult and dominated by work, with very little room for leisure and pleasure.

Most women realised their goals of teaching their children German and instilling in them a desire to do well at school. The second generation often managed to achieve what

the first had originally aspired to: joining the middle class. Marriages, that had often been rushed into for pragmatic reasons rather than deep affection, did manage to survive. Usually this was because both partners were committed to providing the children with a secure home. Despite this, several women characterised their partnerships as unhappy, and marriages to eastern European men seem to have been particularly difficult. The main causes appear to have been different role expectations, cultural differences and their partners' strong need to spend time with their particular ethnic group. Sometimes German churches and congregations took on the important function of providing pastoral and social support. As the migrants get older, this aspect is becoming increasingly important. However, many have been left with nobody to turn to for support.

The wave of German migration to Britain occurred in the specific context of the immediate post-war period, at a time when suffering and grief were still fresh in everybody's minds. This was recalled by the interviewees, first, because of how it affected their relationships with the local British population, and also because it meant they were frequently confronted with negative images of Germany and the Germans, particularly the assumption that all Germans were Nazis. Nearly all talked about having experienced anti-German feelings, attitudes and opinions of one type or another, particularly during the first 20 years. Some downplayed it, but most took it very seriously and remembered it as a highly unpleasant experience. Those who settled in rural Scotland expressed enthusiasm for the local population there. This contrasted with the Germans who settled in the south of Britain, who continued to have reservations about 'the English'. They emphasised the differences rather than the similarities, possibly as a reaction to their initial reception, which they perceived as unwelcoming. As a result, for many years the majority had made an effort not to appear German, some even to the point of denying their nationality. And it was not only the migrants themselves that were the target of anti-German sentiments, often their children were too. They had to confront anti-German stereotypes, in popular children's war games and at school. In some cases, it appears this led to psychological problems. Some children reacted by refusing to speak German, a few even left Britain as young adults to settle in Germany or elsewhere. Most Germans felt personally affronted when the British media presented programmes about German atrocities committed during the Nazi period. On this issue it became apparent that gender influenced attitudes: Women tended to reflect critically to a far greater extent than their male counterparts, whereas most ex-POWs appeared to have become quite defensive.

Despite having lived in Britain for half a century, most Germans still feel they do not really belong. In the course of time, they have developed a specific blend of Germanness and Britishness, however most retained their German citizenship. For many, the German passport symbolises their close relationship to Germany, albeit an imagined Germany based on their memories of the *Heimat,* their childhood and youth. In contrast to this, their relationship with the Federal Republic is ambivalent: Whilst Germany's political and cultural development has been followed with great interest, their experiences when visiting present-day Germany have not always been positive, despite immense and continuing admiration for the country's material achievements. Over the years, many have begun to feel alienated from their Germany and its people. This hybrid identity is now a cause of concern for those debating whether or not to return to Germany, a big concern as they face old age with a shrinking social network and often on a modest state

pension. Once retired, contact with German institutions has become important. It seems that a deep longing for the old *Heimat* co-exists with a more pragmatic realisation that they have spent 50 years making the best of things and creating a new life for themselves in Britain, and perhaps this is where they are now most at home.

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94 Interview Lisbeth H.
95 Interview Viktor T.

96 Interview Ilona O.
97 Interview Elvira D.
98 Interview Monika H.
99 Interview Emma C.
100 Interviews Moritz A., Herta D.
101 Interview Joanna S.
102 Interview Luci N.
103 Interview Peter C.
104 Interview Henrike G.
105 Interview Moritz A.
106 Interview Henrike G.
107 Interview Gretel D.
108 Interview Elsa G.
109 Interview Jean Z.
110 Interview Moritz A.
111 Interview Justus L.
112 Interview Edeltraud K.
113 BHRU B0005 (Ukrainian). BHRU B0008 (Ukrainian). BHRU B0018 (Ukrainian). BHRU B0077 (Pole). BHRU B0130 (Ukrainian).
114 Interview Monika H.
115 Interview Hermine S.
116 Interviews Knut N., Helmut L.
117 Interviews Gisela C., Emma C., Hanna C.
118 Interview Peter C.
119 Interview Hedwig Q.
120 Interview Lisbeth H.
121 Interview Edeltraud K.
122 Interview Gerhard U.
123 Interview Winfried C.
124 Interview Luci N.
125 Interview Magda B.
126 Interview Elvira D.
127 Interview Luci N.
128 Interview Irma H.
129 Interview Margarete T.
130 Interview Erdmute U.
131 Interview Erwin S.
132 Interview Heide C.
133 Interview Hedwig D.
134 Interview Edeltraud K.
135 Interview Helmut L.
136 Interview Vera I.
137 Interview Paulus M.
138 Interview Arthur S.
139 Interview Gerold M.
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146 Interview Winfried C.

147 Interview Erwin S.
148 Interview Henrike G.
149 Interview Isolda L.
150 Interview Heide C.
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152 Interview Edda U.
153 Interview Gernot H.
154 Interview Edeltraud K.
155 Interview Her mine S.
156 Interview Elvira D.
157 Interview Hermine S.
158 Interview Magda B.
159 Interview Mechthild Z.
160 Interview Elvira D.
161 Interview Ewald C.
162 Interview Magda B.
163 Interview Emma C.
164 Interview Hermine S.
165 Interview Helene K.
166 Interview Gabi N.
167 Interview Magda B.
168 Interview Klemens I.
169 Interview Martha H.
170 Interview Elsa G.
171 Interview Heide C.
172 Interview Mizzi T.
173 Interview Hanna C.
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176 Interview Mechthild Z.
177 Interview Elsa G.
178 Interview Mechthild Z.
179 Ibid.
180 Interview Elsa G.
181 Interview Jean Z.
182 Interview Klemens I.
183 Interview Theda B.
184 Interview Gretel D.
185 Interview Henrike G.
186 Interview Karl-Heinz C.
187 Interview Käthe T.
188 Interview Hedwig D.
189 Interview Viktor T.
190 Interview Phillip H.
191 Interview Hedwig Q.
192 Interview Isolda L.
193 Interview Hermine S.
194 Interview Heide C.
195 Interview Ewald C.

List of archives

1. Archives in the United Kingdom

Public Record Office, London (PRO)

AST 12	National Assistance Board
AST 16	
BT 175	Cotton Board
CAB 103	Cabinet Office
CAB 130	
CAB 134	
FO 371	Foreign Office
FO 936	Control Office for Germany and Austria
FO 938	
FO 939	
FO 940	
FO 945	
FO 1006	Control Commission for Germany (British Element)
FO 1013	
FO 1023	
FO 1051	
HO 213	Home Office
LAB 8	Ministry of Labour
LAB 9	
LAB 10	
LAB 12	
LAB 13	
LAB 17	
LAB 22	National Service Hostels Corporation
LAB 23	Ministry of Labour
LAB 26	

LAB 37

LAB 38

MAF 47 Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

MAF 186

PREM 8 Prime Minister's Office

WO 32 War Office

WO 165

Imperial War Museum, London (IWM)

Papers of Colonel Henry Faulk
Papers of Mrs H G Kuhn
Papers of Arthur Riegel
Papers of Miss J White
Papers of Mrs D M Wood

Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh (SRO)

AF 59 Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland

Church of England Record Centre, London (CERC)

BCC British Council of Churches

Lambeth Palace Library, London (LPL)

Papers of George Kennedy Allen Bell, Bishop of Chichester
Papers of Geoffrey Francis Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury

University of Warwick: Modern Records Centre, Coventry (UW-MRC)

MSS.157 Victor Gollancz Papers

MSS.243 Young Women's Christian Association

MSS.292 Trades Union Congress

London Metropolitan University (LMU-TUC)

Trades Union Congress Library Collections

British Red Cross, Barnett Hill (BRC)

Local and County Archives

Bolton Archive and Local Studies Service, Bolton (BALSS)
Bradford District Archives, Bradford (BDA)
Bury Archive Service, Bury (BAS)
Calderdale District Archives, Halifax (CDA)
Greater Manchester County Record Office, Manchester (GMCRO)
Greater Manchester Police Museum, Manchester (GMPM)

Lancashire Record Office, Preston (LRO)
Manchester City Archives Department, Manchester (MCAD)
Oldham Archives Service, Oldham (OAS)
Rochdale Library Service, Rochdale (RLS)

German Church Archives
Deutsche Evangelische Kirche Bradford (DEKB)
Deutsche Evangelische Gemeinde Liverpool (DEGL)
Deutsche Evangelische Gemeinde Sydenham (DECS)

London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Local History Library, London (DESGK)
Deutsche Evangelische St Georgs-Kirche

German YMCA, London (GYMCA)

2. Archives in Germany

Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA)

Z 1 Länderrat, Amerikanische Zone

Z 2 Zonenbeirat, Britische Zone

Z 35 Deutsches Büro für Friedensfragen

Z 40 Zentralamt für Arbeit in der britischen Zone

B 102 Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft

B 106 Bundesministerium des Innern

B 119 Bundesministerium für Arbeit

B 136 Bundeskanzleramt

B 149 Bundesministerium für Arbeit

B 150 Bundesministerium für Vertriebene

OMGUS Office of Military Government, United States

Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg (BAM)

B 205 Wissenschaftliche Kommission für deutsche Kriegsgefangenengeschichte

Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn (PA)

Abt. 2 Politische Abteilung

Abt. 3 Länderabteilung

Abt. 5 Rechtsabteilung

Deutsche Botschaft London

Nordrhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (HStAD)

NW 58	Innenministerium

Deutscher Caritasverband, Freiburg (DCV)

111	Zentralrat
327.92	Haus Lioba, London
329.1	Deutscher Nationalverband katholischer Mädchenschutzvereine
372	Kriegsgefangenenhilfe

Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin (EZA)

B 2	Kirchenkanzlei
B 6	Kirchliches Außenamt
B 7	Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat
B 509	Sammlung Birger Forell
B 620	Nachlaß Julius Rieger

Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, Bonn (KFZ)
Nachlaß Albert Büttner

3. Archives in Switzerland

Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, Genf (CICR)

Alliance Universelle des Unions Chrétiennes de Jeunes Gens, Genf (AUUCJG)

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