

**On 25 December 1938 youngsters from a Kindertransport report
on their reception in Britain¹**

Report on the Refugee Children's Camp (Broadstairs), dated 25 December 1938²

In early December, children and teenagers in various German cities were informed that they should get ready as quickly as possible for a transport to England. There were children from Vienna (around 600), Berlin (200), Hamburg (200), and various smaller cities. Each child was supposed to take along only what he himself could carry. It soon turned out that a great many had equipped themselves inappropriately, at least with respect to the cold and damp Lowestoft Camp, which took in around 600 of them.³

The border control was quite abrasive in some cases, harmless in others. In Holland there was a very warm reception, which all the children still recall fondly. In England the children coming from the various regions of the Reich were brought together. That caused certain problems at first. The children were full of prejudices against those from other regions, while others claimed that they gained their unfavourable impressions only after getting to know their comrades.

The children who were accommodated in Lowestoft encountered quite adverse conditions there. The area is indeed quite lovely, an ideal bathing beach for the summer, but during the first few days the weather was very wet there, and in the following days unusually cold. The camp offered little protection against wet and cold conditions. The children slept in wooden huts, actually bathing huts. The common rooms were quite large and the only heating was provided by extremely small furnaces.

In addition, no group leaders were present at first, so that there was little organization and order. Over the course of the first week, group leaders gradually appeared, but the conditions were still poor in terms of organization and order. Almost all the efforts of these leaders aimed at wangling a little protection for their charges against cold and hunger. The somewhat chaotic situation resulted in some unwelcome spontaneous formations of groups. Besides the aforementioned regional antagonism, several others took shape: for example, opposition between 'Jews' and 'Christians', between the individual groups, and between individual persons.

Particularly unpleasant consequences of the weather in Lowestoft were the freezing of the water pipes and the destruction of the doors of the huts by the storm. The former event had rendered the water closets, washrooms, etc. unusable. The latter had made many dwellings uninhabitable. The group leaders had to abandon almost all requirements for hygiene and cleanliness.

The food situation in Lowestoft was uneven but also impaired by lack of organization, distribution, and discipline. It was not possible to allot time and plan the day properly. One was happy if one was not freezing for at least a part of the day. But good programmes had been prepared to keep the boys and girls busy and teach them.

1 CAHJP, HMB 3103, inv. nos. 1069–1071. This document has been translated from German.

2 The original is dated 25 Nov. 1938. It is clear from the report, however, that this must be a typographical error.

3 Lowestoft is situated in the county of Suffolk on the British North Sea coast.

After a few days, almost all the girls in the camp were sent to other places. Under the difficult local conditions, this was a necessary measure. Similarly, the clearing of the camp soon began, starting with the younger age groups.

The children had arrived in Lowestoft on Monday, 12 December. By 21 December the camp was almost completely vacated again. It is nonetheless remarkable that no serious illnesses resulted.

The group writing this report was sent to Broadstairs, Kent. Other groups were sent to Southwold,⁴ Leeds, and other places.

Our group consists of ninety boys between the ages of 14 and 17. At the moment they are divided into four smaller groups that are approximately equal in size and into the same number of houses.

The journey from Lowestoft to Broadstairs took us through London, where the committee had prepared a light meal. Most exciting, however, was the bus trip from one railway station (Liverpool Street) to another (Victoria). We reached Broadstairs late at night.

We had a very pleasant first impression here. We found the climate much milder and calmer than in Lowestoft. True, there was also snow on the ground, but there was no harsh wind blowing around us. We went by vehicle and on foot to the St Mary's Convalescent Home, where we were all quartered for the first day and first night. This home is run by an Anglican sisterhood of nuns, who greeted us in a really friendly way and to this very day help us in word and deed in an extraordinary manner.

The next day we went to our present quarters. We live:

Group 1, Dr Paul Bergmann, 17 Stone Road, tel. 124

Group 2, Dr Willi Pollak, Stone Road, tel. 85

Group 3, Mr David Harland, Henley Lawn, Crow Bill, tel. 117

Group 5, Nurse Pappworth and Nurse Jameson, St Mary's Home, tel. 639. In a few days Group 4, like the others, will move into private quarters. The houses are nice accommodation with common rooms, which are well heated and have a radio, piano, and board games. The bedrooms contain between one and four beds. They are not warm, but – after Lowestoft – we are very content with them. There is hot water, as much as you like. The food is different in every location. At the moment efforts are being made to raise the standard in the worse houses to that in the better ones.

Broadstairs is situated on the North Sea. Our windows look directly on to the sea. It is a spa and seaside resort with around 16,000 inhabitants but gives the impression of being a deeply tranquil, prosperous small town. A single street brings together all the shops and cinemas. Everything else is villas and convalescent homes, hotels, and the like. The countryside is hilly, and in this weather, which is quite uncommon, however, would offer a good opportunity for skiing.

We are looking for work for the boys. We are not bored, but we prefer to show our gratitude to the English through useful activity and to learn something ourselves in the process. Some of us, of course, always have kitchen duty, while others help with this and that, but we hope that proper skilled manual work will soon be made possible for us. From tomorrow, eight boys will be in daytime auxiliary service at Margate Hospital, and

4 Correctly: Southwold, a small town situated in the county of Suffolk on the British North Sea coast.

one will have a job with an electrical engineer, but for most of them we have nothing as yet. To be sure, the stay here is intended to be only a provisional arrangement for them all, before they are placed in families and jobs. But nonetheless, useful work would be needed even now. Incidentally, not every type of work is welcome, as we have learned. We offered to help with clearing away the snow but were refused with thanks, as there are unemployed men in the town with nothing to do, who might resent our doing unpaid work.

Our relations with the people of the town, the committee, and individuals are the best imaginable. We are repeatedly touched by the incredible kindness of people of all classes, which, as it is Christmas now, is also shown to us in the form of many gifts of many kinds. We were invited to the cinema, to sport events, etc., and we hope we have not given too much offence through our ignorance of the English rules of polite conduct. Our English colleagues, of course, are especially helpful to us with such things.

Our mood is excellent. Indeed, during the day we often completely forget about German matters and even about our own uncertain future prospects. The solidarity of the boys is excellent, the group leaders work together readily and without any friction, and there is almost no work left to be done by the central leadership of the groups in Broadstairs. After all, the number of groups and the number of boys in each group is not so large that it would prevent easy human interaction.