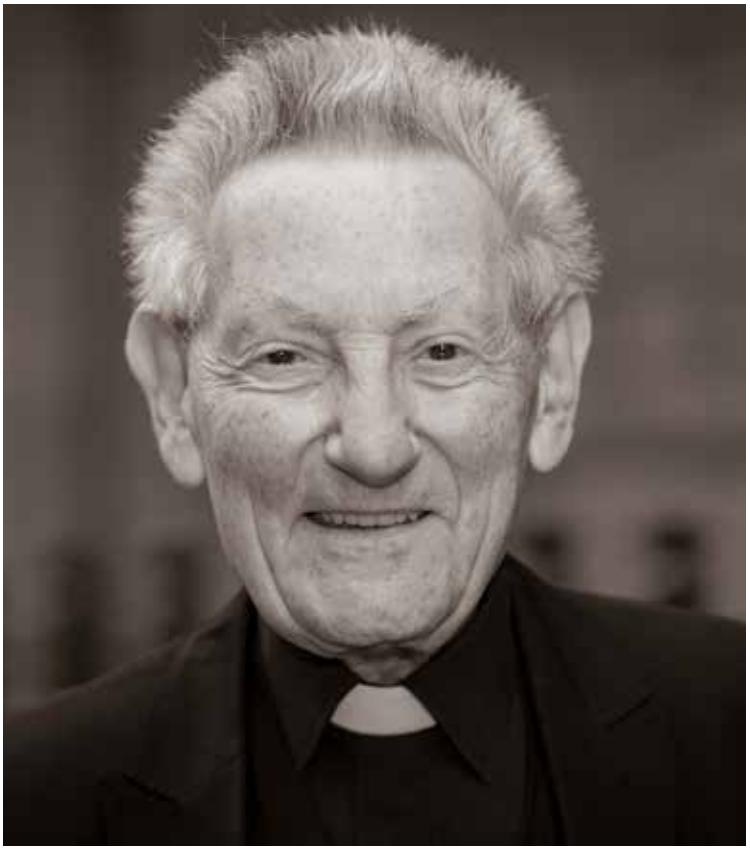
My Story

Father Francis Wahle

AJR The Association of Jewish Refugees



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These are Father Francis's words. This is his story.

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).
www.ajrmystory.org.uk www.ajr.org.uk

Father Francis spoke to AJR volunteer Francesca Giannini to share his story. Thanks also to AJR volunteers Cynthia Mindell and Shelley Hyams.

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My Story
Father Francis Wahle

"There are so many different things to experience. Even the things which are not good, you can still get something positive out of them."

With my sister

Contents

Early life in Vienna

I WAS BORN in Vienna in August 1929 to a middle-class family. My father, Karl Wahle, was a judge and my mother, Hedwig Brunner, an insurance actuary. The house we lived in belonged to the extended family and we owned one-eighth. It was one of those stone-block buildings and we were on the fourth floor.

My father was born in 1887 and my mother in 1897. He started his career as an historian and switched to law. During World War One, he worked in the legal department of the Austro-Hungarian Army and suffered a nervous breakdown because of the pressure he was put under to obey military laws that he personally opposed.

My mother was a gifted pianist and very much an outgoing and practical person, unlike my father who was quite the opposite. We had a live-in maid, which might explain why he didn't know how to do practical things. Later on in life, he had to find out how one cleans one's shoes by watching a shoe-shine boy.

When I was born, my father was 41 and my mother was 31. My only grandparent still alive died when I was two. I was baptised when I was three days old. I was the older of two children: my sister, Anne, was born two-and-a-half years after me. We had a children's room for Anne and me. I remember one of those wireless radios where you turned the knobs and got all the different frequencies. There was a piano and many books. We lived very comfortably.

There was an ice-box in the kitchen; this was before electric fridges. Every week, the men would come with sacks of ice on their shoulders and climb the four flights of stairs to our flat – there were no lifts – and put the blocks of ice in the back of the box to keep food fresh.

I was made to play the piano and also sent to ballet school, where I was one of few boys who attended. I was quite good at singing and if I'd stayed in Vienna, I was told I would probably have joined the Vienna Boys' Choir. I think I was a rather studious, serious boy and when asked what I wanted to become, I said 'a scholar'. I lived a very sheltered existence.

My mother

All my grandparents were Jewish. My mother was raised Jewish though I didn't know that; she never went to a synagogue and did not practice any of the Jewish rituals at home. My father had become a Catholic in 1911 when he was in his 20s. He read himself into his Christian belief. He kept it up and went regularly to Mass with my sister and me on Sundays. The Mass we went to was a concert as well as a religious service, held in the Hofburgkapelle (Imperial Court Chapel). A big orchestra would perform Masses by Beethoven and Mozart and you had to book and pay for seats, while others stood at the back.

My parents were married in St Stephen's Cathedral, presumably not in front of everybody, but in the sacristy – the side room where the priest puts his vestments on - because my mother was not Catholic. The wedding was kept quiet because it was a disgrace when a Catholic married out of the religion – a little like the Jewish idea of marrying out.

I went to a Catholic school. Now there is a Holocaust memorial on the Judenplatz (Jewish Square), where the school was. It was within easy walking distance from where we lived in the centre of Vienna. The city was divided into districts, and we were in the first district, near the Donaukanal (Danube Canal), just round the corner from where the Gestapo Headquarters would later be situated. ■

"My parents were married in St Stephen's Cathedral, presumably not in front of everybody, but in the sacristy – the side room where the priest puts his vestments on - because my mother was not Catholic."

My father

The Nazis invade Austria and we join the *Kindertransport*

HITLER MARCHED INTO Austria in March 1938 and my father, who was in state employment, was immediately pensioned off. My mother was in private employment and so she was able to carry on working.

As a result of the Nazi invasion, my sister and I were asked to leave our Catholic school. That was my first intimation that I wasn't, in Hitler's eyes, Christian. Anne and I then went to a different school. It would have been for one term at the most as things escalated pretty quickly. When Hitler annexed Austria, my parents first tried to get us to Italy; my mother's family came from Trieste and we had relatives there. Before the war, we had been to Italy on holiday and we knew our relatives to some extent, but they were not able to get the necessary papers to allow us to go. There were always more fees to be paid or a visa to be obtained. I'm not certain that my father would have left for Italy in any case. He was reluctant to leave Austria for two main reasons. He said, "I am a state employee and a state employee does not desert the state. Secondly, if we went elsewhere, I couldn't work as a judge. I would have to be supported by my wife and a man isn't supported by his wife."

He certainly didn't want to go to South America. My mother could have gone there: as an actuary and a mathematician she could work anywhere and I think she had an offer, but my father said no.

Kristallnacht happened on 9 November 1938. It was the signal that things should be taken very seriously. My mother belonged to different organisations and from the Soroptimist Sisters Circle, which was quite a powerful international women's organisation, she heard about the *Kindertransport*, which was sending children out of Vienna to Britain. She probably pulled strings to get Anne and me onto a train. The first train was in December and my sister and I left in January 1939.

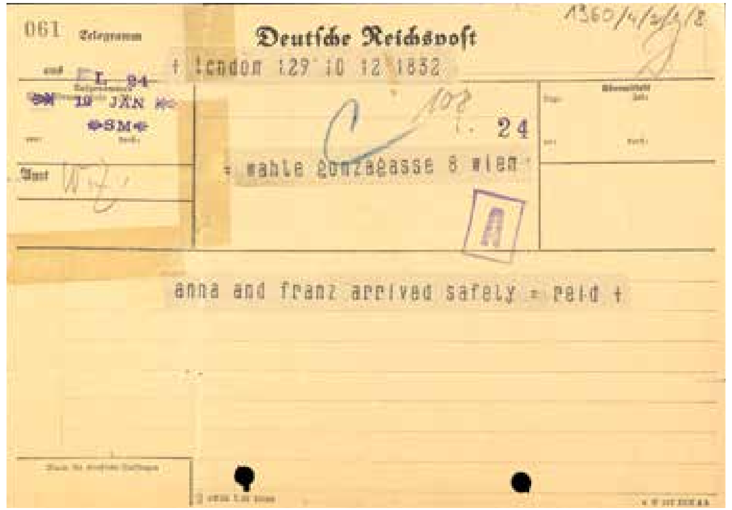
When I was at an AJR meeting recently, I met someone who came on a separate *Kindertransport* from his sister, which came as a surprise to me as I had always assumed that brothers and sisters travelled together.

These trains started from the Westbahnhof, a station on the west side of Vienna, in the evening and travelled through Germany, stopping at various places, presumably gathering more children. We went through Holland to the Hook of Holland, where we boarded a boat to Harwich, and then back on a train to Liverpool Street Station in London.

It was quite a tedious journey. I was nine and my sister was seven - she had celebrated her birthday just the month before. The Gestapo made certain that parents were not allowed on the platform because they didn't want any scenes or weeping, so the goodbyes were said away from the platform area. When you are a kid, you just live for the day and you make an adventure out of things. I was told to look after my younger sister – I had a job to do.

Although my sister was younger than me, she noticed more than I did, including that the train was late in departing because something broke down. We started on the evening of 10th January and arrived in London on the 12th.

It must have been awful for parents to let their children go to an unknown situation, not knowing what was going to happen. ■


061 Telegramm

Deutsche Reichspost

+ london 129 10 12 1832

12 JAN

24

= wahle gonzagasse 8 wien

anna and franz arrived safely = paid +

Arrival in London confirmation telegram, 1939

My identification papers, 1938

My parents' lives in occupied Vienna

THE LAWS AGAINST Jews were introduced bit by bit - sort of 'salami tactics', slice by slice. Firstly, Jews were not allowed in certain parks, at meetings, and other things like that. On *Kristallnacht*, some Jews were sent to concentration camps, but most of them were later released. Relatively few of them were killed then. You could continue living as a Jew in Vienna, but it got more and more uncomfortable.

The Nazis forced Jews to move into buildings with other Jews, while non-Jews were given their homes. My parents were forced to let other Jews share their lovely flat; one of those people abided by all the Nazi laws and was nervous because my parents chose not to. Jewish homes had to be identified as such. My mother arranged with the porter downstairs to telephone her if he saw the Gestapo coming. In 1942, May Day - a holiday for workers which usually falls on 1 May - fell on 2 May. My parents assumed that the Gestapo wouldn't be working, and my father happened to be out when the porter telephoned that the Gestapo had arrived. My mother took the call, tucked her handbag under her arm, and walked down the stairs - straight past the Gestapo, remarking something about there being an awful din. The Gestapo must have been tremendously annoyed when they realised she had slipped the net.

My parents

Even after war broke out, my sister and I had received monthly letters from our parents, up to the permitted 40 words, sent

through the Red Cross. But, from that day in May 1942, when our parents went underground, there was complete silence and we didn't know what had happened to them. From then until April 1945, they were non-persons, without any documents or contact with their friends.

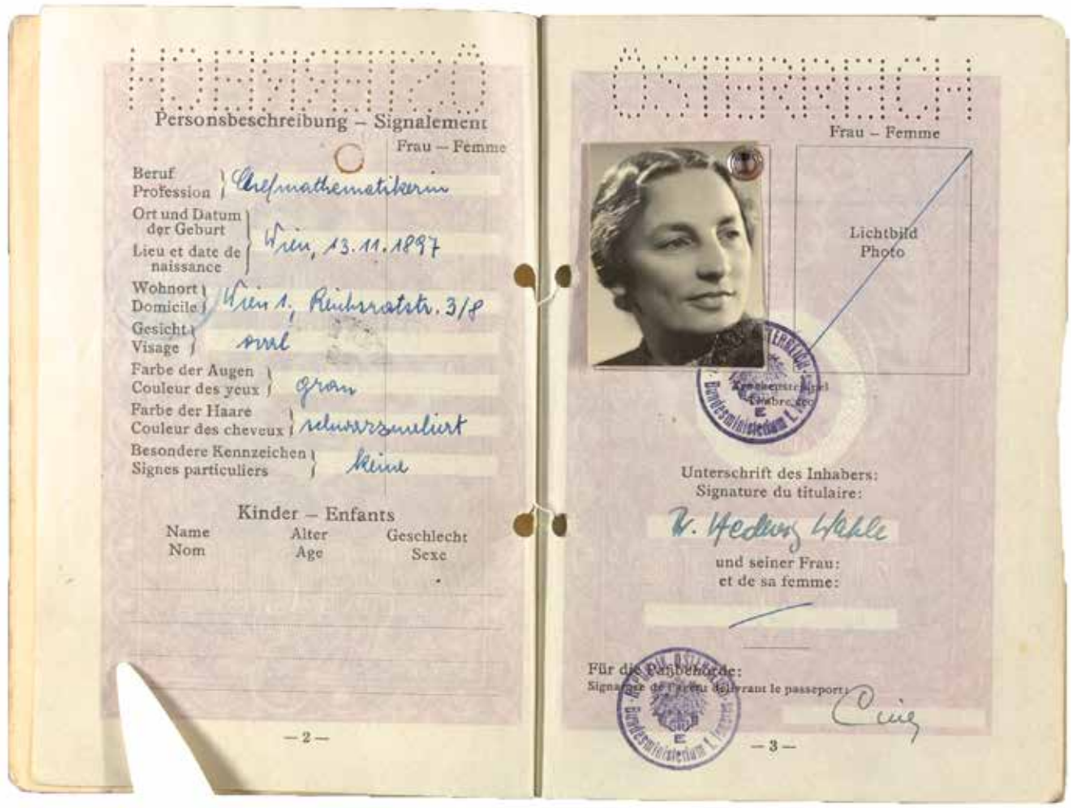
It was best not to involve friends. For instance, preparing to have to leave their home at some stage, my parents gave some of their belongings to the woman who had been my mother's nanny when she was young. That woman had a son who was a teacher and very organised. He had labelled these objects, 'the property of Dr Wahle'. The Nazis soon found out the connection between my parents and the woman. They went to raid her flat, saw these items and took the old woman in for interrogation. She was probably in her seventies. She didn't know where my parents were and must have told them that the items were 'gifts from the doctor'.

You couldn't involve your friends because it was dangerous for them and they might crack, which wasn't safe for you. You had to be anonymous. You couldn't stay in the open because the weather in Vienna in the winter was impossible. Also, if you were challenged by the police, what story could you give them?

My mother, being very inventive, concocted a yarn. She said that she was married to a policeman but was having a love affair with another man and needed somewhere to stay with her lover for two nights during the week! She asked the landladies not to tell the police in case her husband found out, which would wreck their marriage. For three years, my parents moved from one landlady to another with the same story. The Viennese were romantics and the landladies said they wouldn't tell the police. At any stage when my parents felt they had stayed long enough, they simply moved on to the next lodgings.

Vienna was big enough to move around in. It wasn't so necessary towards the end of the three years, when the Allies started bombing, because everyone went to the air-raid shelters and nobody questioned you – everybody fled together. My parents were always praying for bombings. They never left Vienna except on one occasion, when my mother was very run-down

Early identification papers of my father



My mother's identification papers

and went to the country for a weekend. Staying in the country was much more liable to get you caught. If someone moved into a small village, they would stand out. In a big town, nobody knows anyone else and you can move around and disappear.

My mother was very clever and of the opinion that the Nazis weren't nearly as intelligent and efficient as they made themselves out to be. She chose to have courage and carry on. She carried that out in all sorts of different ways. Being outside the system, my parents could do anything they liked. My father, no longer working as a judge, knew that he could break the law and tell lies. This government was not a legal one and he was no longer bound by its laws.

My mother did all sorts of things, like smuggling gold. On one occasion, my parents were staying in a hotel where lovers could hire a room for an hour. The police raided it and everyone was taken into custody. When they were all released the next morning, she went back to the police and said, "Where's my gold?" She had been smuggling, but she felt it would be suspicious not to say anything. She got it back! She wouldn't play the victim and was always in control of any situation. ■

"My mother was very clever and of the opinion that the Nazis weren't nearly as intelligent and efficient as they made themselves out to be. She chose to have courage and carry on."

Father's false railcard

My mother

Anne and I are separated in England

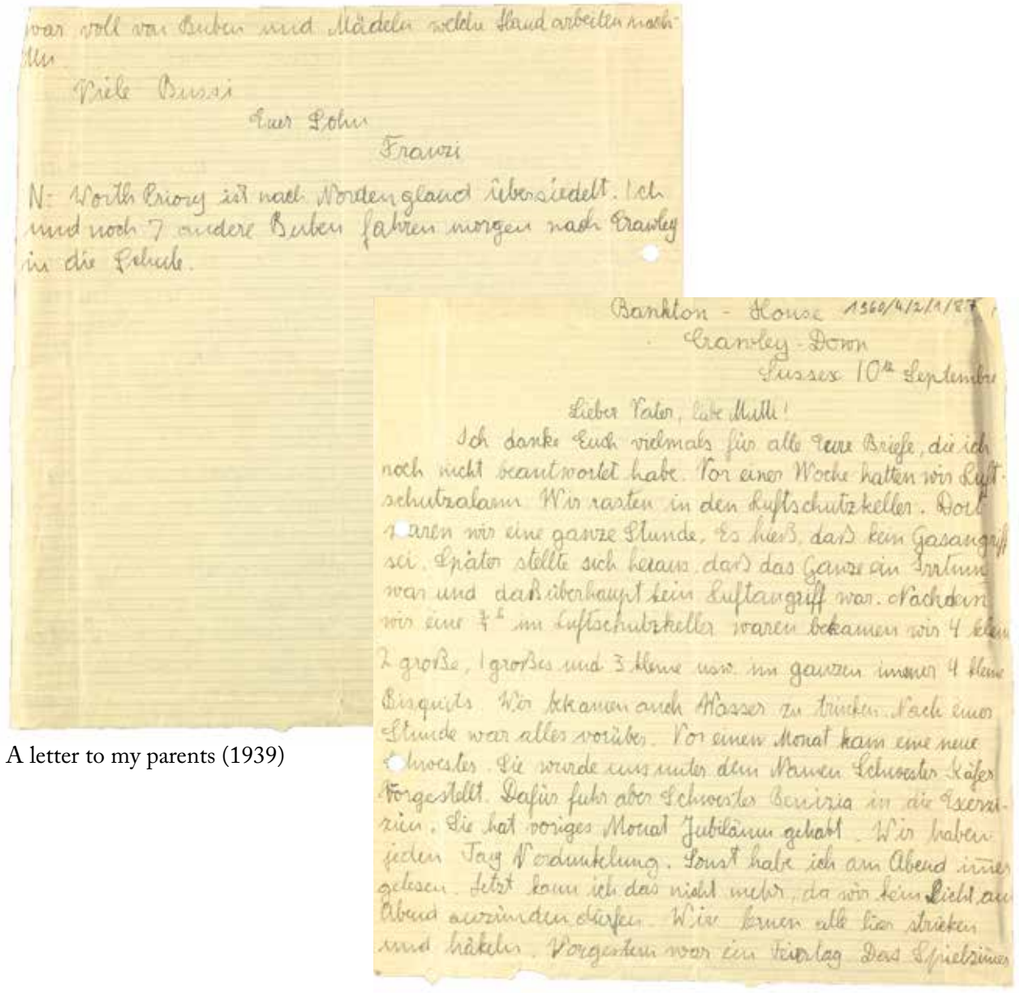
BEFORE MY SISTER and I came over to England, I had learnt some Italian, but from November 1938 onwards, Anne and I had begun learning English.

We arrived at Liverpool Street Station on 12 January 1939. One of our suitcases was missing, but I didn't know the word for it in English. I tried the French word 'baggage', but that was not much help as I used the French pronunciation. My knowledge of English was very limited. Anne was met by a tall gentleman who said she was going to be taken to Brentwood and she, though not having any English, knew that when he booked tickets to Brentford it was the wrong place, but didn't know how to say so. So they went to Brentford first and it was very late at night by the time she arrived at the nuns' convent, where she was supposed to be.

Before anyone could go on one of the *Kindertransports*, they had to have a sponsor who paid £50 as a guarantee that the child wouldn't be a burden on the state and would move on within 18 months or so. My guarantor, Mr Haldinstein, from Norwich, never appeared at Liverpool Street Station. I don't know if he changed his mind or if he never intended to appear. I had no contact with my sponsor and, in fact, only recently learned his name. I was instead taken care of by the Catholic Committee for Refugees. They had been offered Bankton House, a very nice home with a boating pond in Crawley Down, by a Catholic lady, Althea Davis, who had moved with her family into a smaller building. There were about 12 to 15 refugee children there, a couple of nuns and a priest, and it was a German-speaking environment. I must have been one of the youngest children. As a young child, you adapt to your particular surroundings. Although we were living in a German community, everyone spoke English outside. You didn't want to draw attention to the fact that you were outsiders, especially as we were considered enemy aliens after war broke out.

Everyone was very happy there. Anne wasn't taken to the same place as me; I imagine it was because she was too young. In fact, she was very unhappy with the nuns. We had grown up very spoilt, she spoke almost no English, there were no other German-speaking children there, and the nuns had no idea how to treat her. She struggled with the different food and different way of life. Fortunately, she was soon transferred to another convent where she was very happy and eventually became a nun there herself. She was known as Sister Hedwig: she took our mother's name. By that time the war was over and she had returned to Vienna to our parents. ■

"Anne was met by a tall gentleman who said she was going to be taken to Brentwood and she, though not having any English, knew that when he booked tickets to Brentford it was the wrong place, but didn't know how to say so."



Bankton - House
Crawley - Down
Sussex 10th September

Lieber Vater, liebe Mutti!

Ich danke Euch vielmals für alle Eure Briefe, die ich noch nicht beantwortet habe. Vor einer Woche hatten wir Luftschutzalarm. Wir rasten in den Luftschutzkeller. Dort waren wir eine ganze Stunde. Es hieß, daß kein Gasangriff sei. Später stellte sich heraus, daß das Ganze ein Irrtum war und daß überhaupt kein Luftangriff war. Nachdem wir eine 3/4 St. im Luftschutzkeller waren, bekamen wir 4 kleine 2 große, 1 großes und 3 kleine usw. im ganzen immer 4 kleine Biscuits. Wir bekamen auch Wasser zu trinken. Nach einer Stunde war alles vorüber. Vor einem Monat kam eine neue Schwester. Sie wurde uns unter dem Namen Schwester Käfer vorgestellt. Dafür fuhr aber Schwester Beatrix in die Reserve. Sie hat voriges Monat Jubiläum gehabt. Wir haben jeden Tag Verdunklung. Sonst habe ich am Abend immer gelesen. Jetzt kann ich das nicht mehr, da wir kein Licht am Abend anzünden dürfen. Wir können alle hier stricken und häkeln. Vorgestern war ein Feiertag. Das Spielzimmer

A letter to my parents (1939)

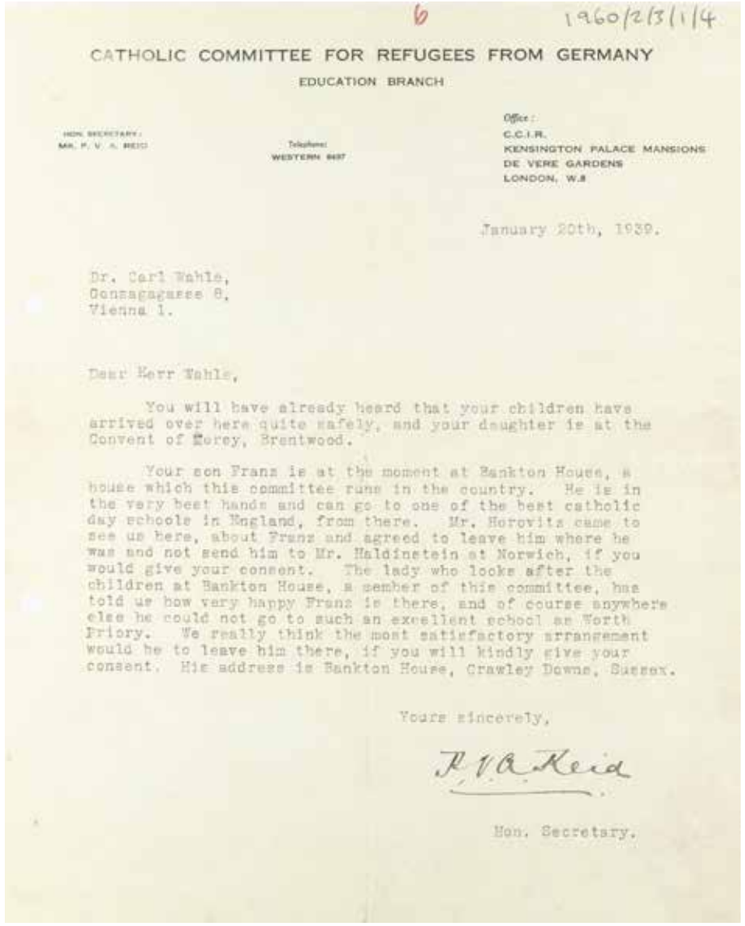
My school life

I WAS VERY lucky to be in Bankton House. I had really fallen on my feet! After a time, they felt that I had enough English to go to the nearby preparatory school for Worth Priory. It was the obvious place for me, being the nearest Catholic school. However, I was only there a short time before I was thrown out. In Vienna, I had been reading Jules Verne and here they made me read Winnie the Pooh. I think I was bolshie and rebellious. So this is on my curriculum vitae: 'Expelled from school!'

A distant relative, Cara Czeczowiczka, had also escaped from Austria with her family. She went to the Catholic Committee for Refugees to push them to provide me with a good education. The Jesuits in the north of England offered me a free boarding place in Hodder, the preparatory school for Stonyhurst College, from Christmas 1940. Meanwhile I spent the summer of 1940 with a couple of spinster ladies in Paignton, Devon, who were to teach me English manners.

Hodder is on the River Ribble. The official address was Blackburn in Lancashire, but it was actually nearer to Preston. There were around 450 boys there. I went up to the main school in the term after I joined until the summer of 1947. I was a boarder, spending my holidays in Blackpool (along with another boy, Richard Komlosy from Austria), at the home of a foster mother called 'Auntie Mary', a very lively Lancashire lass. I was a good student, winning prizes and a scholarship, but I didn't excel at sports. The only thing I was good at was long-distance running because, even though I wasn't fast and I wasn't strong, I just persevered.

Apart from our studies, sports and religion, we also undertook some military training in the Junior Training Corps (JTC). During the war, clothing was rationed, so we had no uniforms. Things were relatively relaxed and informal. Being in the country, the food was good: there was plenty of butter, bacon and eggs. It was a very happy time but, on the other hand, I was different and the other boys treated me that way. I had one friend, Peter Gigli whose home was near Blackpool. Most of the others boys were from upper-class, rich families, many of them



b 1960/2/3/1/4

CATHOLIC COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES FROM GERMANY

EDUCATION BRANCH

HON. SECRETARY:
MR. F. V. A. REID

Telephone:
WESTERN 8497

Office:
C.C.I.R.
KENSINGTON PALACE MANSIONS
DE VERE GARDENS
LONDON, W.8

January 20th, 1939.

Dr. Carl Wahle,
Donnagagasse 8,
Vienna I.

Dear Herr Wahle,

You will have already heard that your children have arrived over here quite safely, and your daughter is at the Convent of Mercy, Brentwood.

Your son Franz is at the moment at Bankton House, a house which this committee runs in the country. He is in the very best hands and can go to one of the best catholic day schools in England, from there. Mr. Horovitz came to see us here, about Franz and agreed to leave him where he was and not send him to Mr. Haldinstein at Norwich, if you would give your consent. The lady who looks after the children at Bankton House, a member of this committee, has told us how very happy Franz is there, and of course anywhere else he could not go to such an excellent school as North Priory. We really think the most satisfactory arrangement would be to leave him there, if you will kindly give your consent. His address is Bankton House, Crawley Downs, Sussex.

Yours sincerely,

F. V. A. Reid

Hon. Secretary.

Letter to my father from the Catholic Committee for Refugees from Germany (1939)

from abroad. There was pocket money of sixpence a week which I used to buy writing paper and stamps so I could write to my parents, but it wasn't enough so I had to find a way of making more money. We were given ration coupons for sweets and I sold mine. The teachers didn't understand why I did so; they thought I was mercenary and behaving like a 'typical Jew' for selling them.

My sister Anne visited me when I was at Bankton House. The first time she came, a lady drove her in a wooden van. Before they started the journey, she took her to a patisserie and because she was so excited to be seeing her brother, she vomited everything up in the van.

Later on, when I was in Blackpool on holiday from school, Anne came up and visited me there. It was during the time that the Nazis were bombing. We weren't allowed to go onto the train platform to meet her and we ended up missing her. In the meantime, she got herself to a neighbour in a taxi. The first thing she said to my foster mother was, "Auntie Mary, you owe me two and six for the taxi!" She was probably only about eight at the time and she had never been to Blackpool before. ■

"There was pocket money of sixpence a week which I used to buy writing paper and stamps so I could write to my parents"

1960/4/1/2 /28

PHYSICAL EFFICIENCY REPORT

NAME ..... WAHLE, ANTON A.

AGE GROUP ..... 13 - 14

GRADE 4

REMARKS :-

He is physically backward for his age, and next Term he must apply himself to his P.E. if he is to remedy this.

NOTE :-

The Standard of Physical Efficiency is gauged by submitting the boy to 8 Tests.
These Tests have been recommended by the Headmasters' Conference and are also approved by the War Office.
They are well within the compass of the ordinary boy, even if he is not athletically inclined.
They fall under 4 Groups viz. Running, Strength, Agility and Swimming.
Grade 1 means that a boy has passed all 8 Tests.

Grade 2 means that he has passed 7 of the eight.

Grade 3 means that he has passed 5 of the eight.

Grade 4 means that he has passed less than 5.

The Tests are all the same whatever the Age Group of the boy, but the Standard required varies with the boy's age.

The normal standard expected from any boy is the Grade 1.

My PE report (1942). The Remarks section is particularly interesting!

A.M.D.G. 1960/4/1/2 /16

STONYHURST COLLEGE

Report for Christmas. *Term, 1943.*

Name Francis A Wahle *Class* Grammar I

Place in Class 1st *with / without distinction.* *Average age of Class* 14·8

Number of boys placed 26

RESULTS OF TERM EXAMINATION.

Class Subjects.	Maximum Marks.	Marks obtained.	Highest Marks.
Religious Doctrine ...	200	173	173
English	200	185	221
History	200	118	163
Latin	300	249	249
French	300	217	218
Mathematics (Set) ...	300	278	278
Greek	200	179	179
German			
Spanish			
Science	100	69	79
Geography			
Drawing			
Music	( )		

Note: (1) *The letter (a) indicates absence from all or part of an examination.*
(2) *Marks in brackets are not counted for place in class.*

He has worked very hard during the second half of the term and has made excellent progress. His conduct has been most satisfactory. He has played rugger keenly and well.

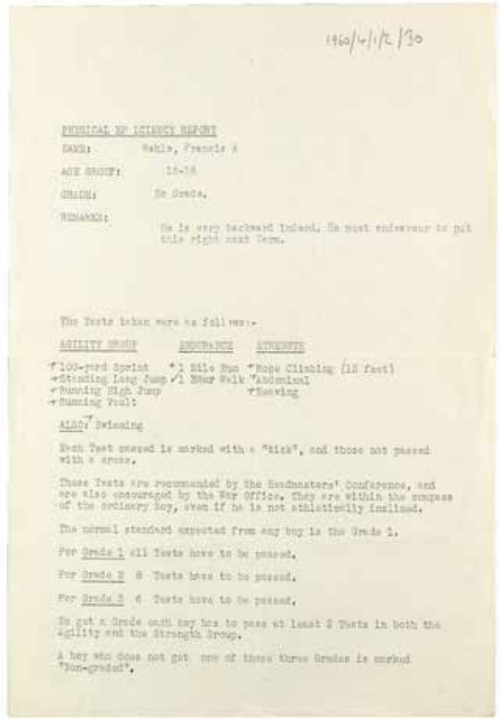
J. Wallace SJ. *Playroom Master.*

GBelton SJ *Rector.*

Boys return on Tuesday, 18th January *and must be indoors by 8 p.m.*

Next Term ends on Tuesday, 11th April

My school report (1943)



1960/4/1/2/30

PHYSICAL EFFICIENCY REPORT

NAME: Wahle, Francis A

AGE GROUP: 16-18

GRADE: No Grade.

REMARKS:

He is very backward indeed. He must endeavour to put this right next Term.

The Tests taken were as follows:-

AGILITY GROUP ENDURANCE STRENGTH

100-yard Sprint 1 Mile Run Rope Climbing (18 feet)
Standing Long Jump Hour Walk Abdominal
Running High Jump Heaving
Running Vault

ALSO: Swimming

Each Test passed is marked with a "tick", and those not passed with a cross.

These Tests are recommended by the Headmasters' Conference, and are also encouraged by the War Office. They are within the compass of the ordinary boy, even if he is not athletically inclined.

The normal standard expected from any boy is the Grade 1.

For Grade 1 all Tests have to be passed.

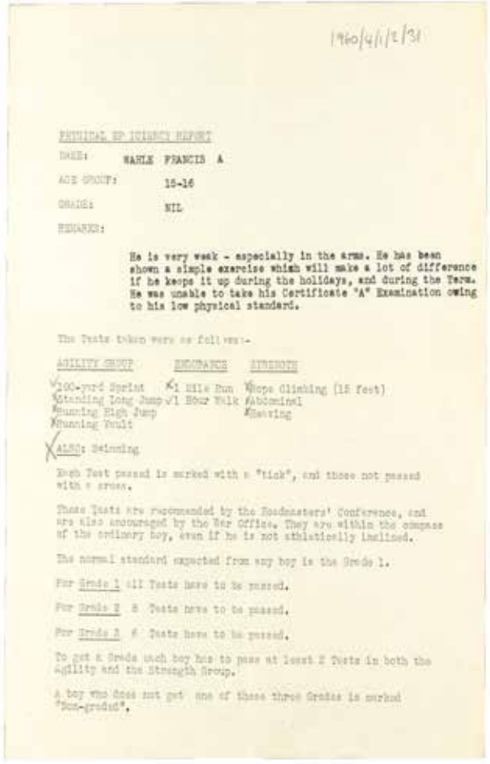
For Grade 2 6 Tests have to be passed.

For Grade 3 4 Tests have to be passed.

To get a Grade each boy has to pass at least 2 Tests in both the Agility and the Strength Group.

A boy who does not get one of these three Grades is marked "Non-graded".

My PE report (1944- term 1)



1960/4/1/2/31

PHYSICAL EFFICIENCY REPORT

NAME: WAHLE FRANCIS A

AGE GROUP: 16-18

GRADE: NIL

REMARKS:

He is very weak - especially in the arms. He has been shown a simple exercise which will make a lot of difference if he keeps it up during the holidays, and during the Term. He was unable to take his Certificate "A" Examination owing to his low physical standard.

The Tests taken were as follows:-

AGILITY GROUP ENDURANCE STRENGTH

100-yard Sprint 1 Mile Run Rope Climbing (18 feet)
Standing Long Jump Hour Walk Abdominal
Running High Jump Heaving
Running Vault

ALSO: Swimming

Each Test passed is marked with a "tick", and those not passed with a cross.

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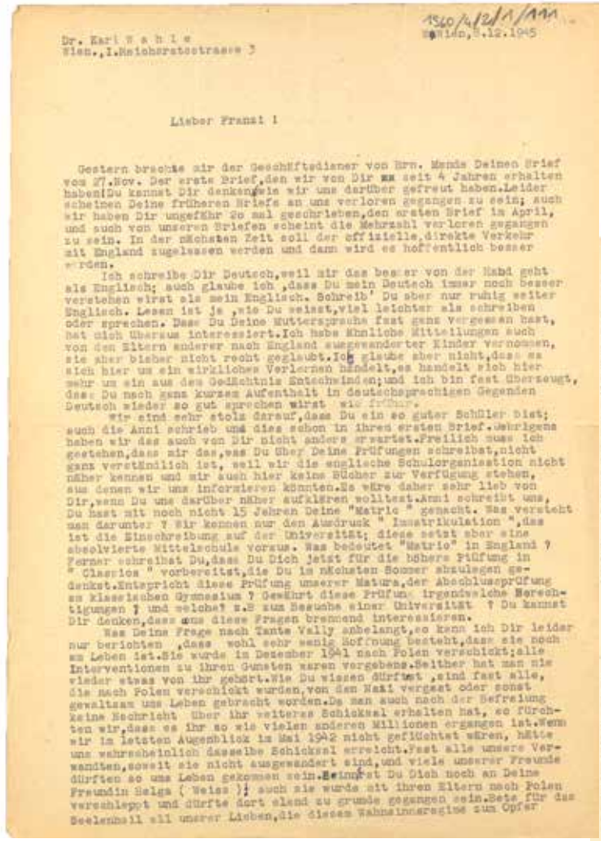
To get a Grade each boy has to pass at least 2 Tests in both the Agility and the Strength Group.

A boy who does not get one of these three Grades is marked "Non-graded".

My PE report (1944- term 2)



1960/4/2/1/111

Dr. Karl Wahle
Wien,,I.Reichsratsstrasse 3

Wien, 8.12.1945

Lieber Franzi !

Gestern brachte mir der Geschäftsdiener von Hrn. Mends Deinen Brief vom 27.Nov. Der erste Brief,den wir von Dir in 4 Jahren erhalten haben!Du kannst Dir denken,wie wir uns darüber gefreut haben.Leider scheinen Deine früheren Briefe an uns verloren gegangen zu sein; auch wir haben Dir ungefähr 20 mal geschrieben,den ersten Brief im April, und auch von unseren Briefen scheint die Mehrzahl verloren gegangen zu sein. In der nächsten Zeit soll der offizielle,direkte Verkehr mit England zugelassen werden und dann wird es hoffentlich besser werden.

Ich schreibe Dir Deutsch,weil mir das besser von der Hand geht als Englisch; auch glaube ich ,dass Du mein Deutsch immer noch besser verstehen wirst als mein Englisch. Schreib' Du aber nur ruhig weiter Englisch. Lesen ist ja ,wie Du weisst,viel leichter als schreiben oder sprechen. Dass Du Deine Muttersprache fast ganz vergessen hast, hat mich überrascht interessiert.Ich habe Ähnliche Mitteilungen auch von den Eltern anderer nach England ausgewanderter Kinder vernommen, sie aber bisher nicht recht geglaubt.Ich glaube aber nicht,dass es sich hier um ein wirkliches Verlernen handelt,es handelt sich hier mehr um ein aus dem Gedächtnis Entschwinden;und ich bin fest überzeugt, dass Du nach ganz kurzem Aufenthalt in deutschsprechenden Gegenden Deutsch wieder so gut sprechen wirst wie früher.

Wir sind sehr stolz darauf,dass Du ein so guter Schüler bist; auch die Anni schrieb uns dies schon in ihren ersten Brief.Übrigens haben wir das auch von Dir nicht anders erwartet.Freilich muss ich gestehen,dass mir das,was Du über Deine Prüfungen schreibst,nicht ganz verständlich ist, weil wir die englische Schulorganisation nicht näher kennen und mir auch hier keine Bücher zur Verfügung stehen, aus denen wir uns informieren könnten.Es wäre daher sehr lieb von Dir,wenn Du uns darüber näher aufklären wolltest.Anni schreibt uns, Du hast mit noch nicht 15 Jahren Deine "Matric " gemacht. Was versteht man darunter ? Wir kennen nur den Ausdruck " Inmatrikulation ",das ist die Einschreibung auf der Universität; diese setzt aber eine absolvierte Mittelschule voraus. Was bedeutet "Matric" in England ? Ferner schreibst Du,dass Du Dich jetzt für die höhere Prüfung in " Classics " vorbereitst,die Du im nächsten Sommer abzulegen gedenkst.Entspricht diese Prüfung unserer Matura,der Abschlussprüfung an klassischen Gymnasium ? Gewährt diese Prüfung irgendwelche Vorrechtigungen ? und welchen z.B zum Besuche einer Universität ? Du kannst Dir denken,dass uns diese Fragen brennend interessieren.

Was Deine Frage nach Tante Vally anbelangt,so kann ich Dir leider nur berichten ,dass wohl sehr wenig Hoffnung besteht,dass sie noch am Leben ist.Sie wurde im Dezember 1941 nach Polen verschickt;alle Interventionen zu ihren Gunsten waren vergebens.Seither hat man nie wieder etwas von ihr gehört.Wie Du wissen dürftest ,sind fast alle, die nach Polen verschickt wurden,von den Nazi vergast oder sonst gewaltsam ums Leben gebracht worden.Da man auch nach der Befreiung keine Nachricht über ihr weiteres Schicksal erhalten hat, so fürchten wir,dass es ihr so wie vielen anderen Millionen ergangen ist.Wenn wir im letzten Augenblick im Mai 1942 nicht geflüchtet wären, hätte uns wahrscheinlich dasselbe Schicksal ereicht.Fast alle unsere Verwandten,soweit sie nicht ausgewandert sind,und viele unserer Freunde dürften so ums Leben gekommen sein.Erkundet Du Dich noch an Deine Freundin Helga (Weiss) ? auch sie wurde mit ihren Eltern nach Polen verschleppt und dürfte dort elend zu grunde gegangen sein.Bete für das Seelenheil all unserer Lieben,die diesem Wahnsinnsregime zum Opfer gefallen sind, und danke Gott,dass er wenigstens Deine Eltern auf wunderbare Weise gerettet hat.

Deinen Wünschen entsprechend hätten wir Euch gerne von uns Photographien geschickt;alte Photographien habe wir aber keine und neue kann man jetzt hier nicht aufertigen lassen,weil die Photographen kein Material haben und daher nicht arbeiten.Die Besatzungsbehörden haben vorgeschrieben,dass jedermann sich eine Legitimation in 4 Sprachen mit Bild ausstellen lassen und diese Legitimation ständig bei sich tragen muss. Diese Vorschrift kann nicht durchgeführt werden, weil sich niemand photographieren lassen kann. Du kannst überzeugt sein,dass wir,sobald eine Möglichkeit besteht, sich photographieren zu lassen, Euch sofort die gewünschten Bilder zukommen lassen werden.

Wir sind nur froh,dass diese Schwierigkeiten in England nicht bestehen und freuen uns schon sehr auf Eure in Aussicht gestellten Bilder.

Du schreibst,dass Du ,und in früheren Jahren auch die Anni, den Sommer wiederum bei Mrs. Bennett verbracht hast. Wir hören diesen Namen zum ersten Male. Wer ist Mrs, Bennett? Wie bist Du mit ihr bekannt geworden und wie ist es gekommen,dass auch Anni bei ihr die Ferien verbringen konnte ?

Schreib' uns,bitte, bald und viel,alles ,was Ihr die Jahre hindurch gemacht habt und noch macht.

Verbring Deine Weihnachtsferien recht angenehm.Wir werden viel an Euch denken,und uns freuen,dass es das erste Mal nach vielen langen Jahren ist, dass wir wieder froh in die Zukunft schauen und hoffen dürfen, dass die Zeit nicht mehr gar zu ferne ist,da wir alle wieder ein frohes Wiedersehen feiern können.

Auch Mitzi lässt Euch alles Gute wünschen.

Viele,viele Küsse von Deinen alten

Vater

Dear Francis,

You cannot imagine how glad we are getting your first direct letter after 4 years of silence .We were looking forward to this day during all the hard time.The little images of saints you sent us 3 years ago were our talisman in the worst danger-times.It is a pity that so many of our letters and of yours answers were lost, as we are expecting every line impatiently.Some days ago we got a long charming letter of dear little Ann telling us that she feels " very proud of Francis " and that she doesn't think "she is quite as clever as Francis ".She is still a darling,is n't she?I wonder if she looks very much the same as she did then.She left us or if she has changed a lot? .Does she to k like you and have you changed much ?

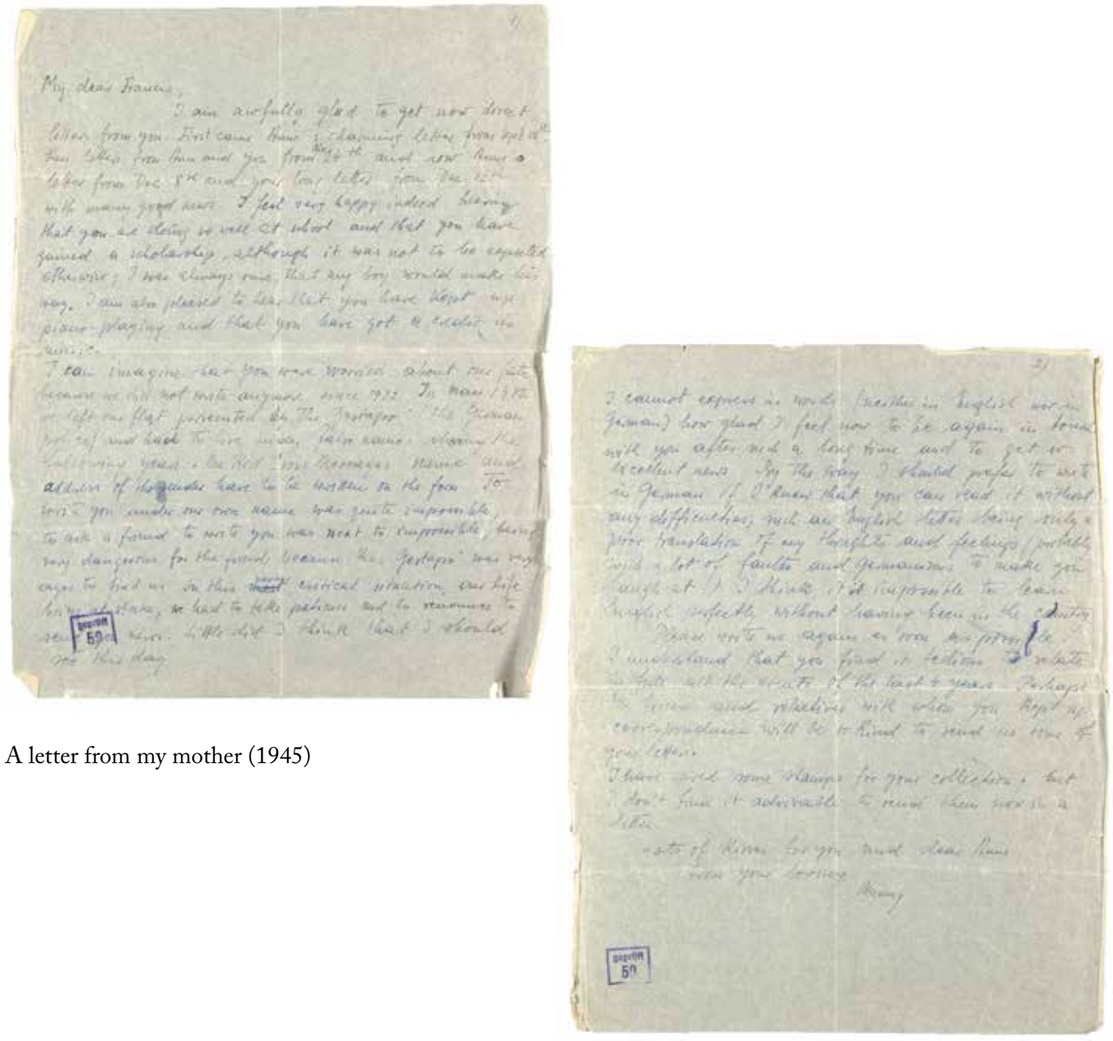
Please tell us much as possible about your life and work and explain us a little bit about school-organisation in England,differing very much from Continental systems,as far as I know.

With many good wishes for your holidays and lots of kisses

your old

Mummy

A letter from my parents (1945)



A letter from my mother (1945)

The Wahles are reunited

VIENNA HAD BEEN fought over by the Russians and Germans, shelled and bombed, and parts of it were just rubble. Whilst the Russians were beleaguering the Austrians, my mother taught herself a little of their language and put a note outside the flat door saying, 'no milk today'. When they saw the note the Russians thought that there were already compatriots living there and didn't bother my parents. After the war, Austria was divided between the four Allied forces and Vienna itself was divided into four zones. The Russian headquarters was almost next door to where my parents had got themselves billeted in a nice flat just behind the Houses of Parliament, which had belonged to a Nazi who had fled.

There was no postal service immediately after the war and no way of making contact with my parents. Eventually, a letter via Portugal came to the Catholic Refugee Council and that was when I knew they were alive. It was still pretty impossible to go to Austria at that stage. My mother, being her usual inventive self, got herself onto a UNESCO conference in Paris in 1947 as a translator and managed to get on a day trip to London. That was the first time I saw her. Anne was there too and we all met for lunch. I was so happy my mother was alive, but Anne was shocked at how she had aged. When we had left Vienna, Mother had been a young woman. Now she was old with grey hair. But she was alive! How she looked was unimportant.

“My mother, being her usual inventive self, got herself onto a UNESCO conference in Paris in 1947 as a translator and managed to get on a day trip to London. That was the first time I saw her.”

My Story Father Francis Wahle

Mother in London, 1947

When we were able to travel the whole family met each year in the British sector of Austria, in Styria where there was more food available and nice countryside. I wasn't able to go in 1950 while applying for British citizenship, which was the year that my sister moved back there.

I wasn't yet 18 when I finished the seven years at Stonyhurst, in 1947. I had the choice to go either into science or classics and I chose classics, studying Latin and Greek. The plan was that I would be prepared to gain a scholarship to one of the universities. I sat the entrance exam to either Oxford or Cambridge (I think it was Cambridge) and got through to the interview stage but wasn't offered a scholarship. As a result, I switched to economics and studied at University College London from 1947 to 1950. My parents wrote to a prosperous family in Canada in the timber business, asking if they would pay for my university studies. The family sent me £50 a month and that paid for my board and lodging at a home for young men in Pimlico. I enjoyed university and the opportunity to meet new people. I was involved with activities at the university chaplaincy and other student organisations. Some of the older students, who had been in the army, tended to have a calming effect during the many protests going on at the time. ■

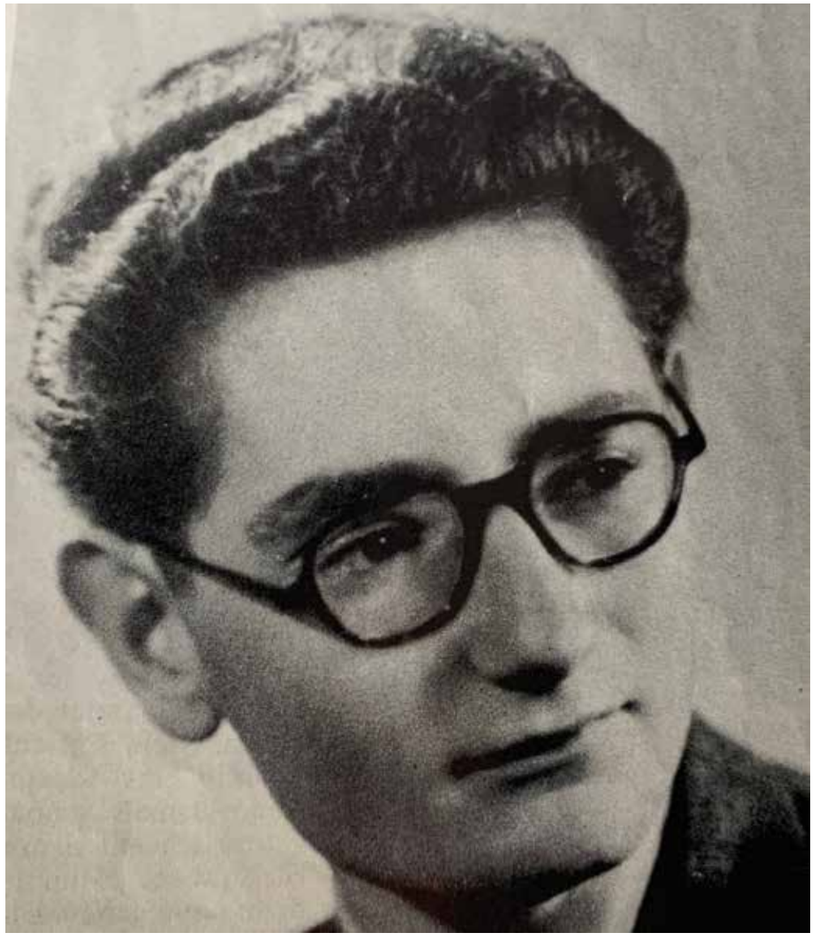
Later identification papers of my father

Working life as an accountant

IN 1950 I began studying accountancy and did my chartered qualification at a small firm near Liverpool Street Station. I was articled to an accountant. In those days you had to pay in order to be articled, but luckily for me the system changed while I was there because people couldn't afford to study, and I was even paid a small wage. I managed quite well in accountancy. I didn't do much studying during the four years I was there, leaving most of it to do in the last three months. I went home to my parents and, to the accompaniment of Mozart, did all the studying I should have done in the previous four years!

After qualifying I went to work for John Lewis in their head office, as assistant to the chief accountant. On my first day, they gave me the employee handbook to read through. On the second day, I had to paint keys in different colours, as they'd got all muddled up. I think they were for money bags, although I didn't ask at the time – I just did what I was asked! I was then involved in new methods of organising the work and very much involved in cycle billing, which is sending out the accounts staggered by the first letter of the client's surname instead of all in one go. It meant the work was spread out over the month. I introduced the system in various branches of John Lewis, including Reading, Newcastle and Liverpool.

"I went home to my parents and, to the accompaniment of Mozart, did all the studying I should have done in the previous four years!"



Me as a young man

It was around this time that I said to my father, "What about me coming home?" My sister was in the convent and my parents were alone so I felt it my duty to go back to be with them, but Father replied, "There is nothing here for you; you are earning more than me. It's much better that you stay and make your way."

John Lewis asked me to take over the accounts in a little store in Weston-super-Mare called Lance & Lance, which they were going to sell. I then came back to head office and they asked me to step in temporarily to run the accounts of John Lewis in Oxford Street. I had about 80 to 100 people under me. That's when I told my boss that I was thinking of leaving and offering myself for the priesthood. It was 1959, I was 30, and I had been with John Lewis for five years at that point. ■

My parents

With my parents

Sister Hedwig

MY MOTHER DIED of cancer in 1957, by which time my sister had joined the convent in Vienna. The nuns said that as long as our father was still alive, they would let Anne stay in Vienna. He died in 1970.

My sister was very active in the Order. Like my mother, she didn't just go with the flow, but initiated new things. For example, the nuns were working as teachers in Catholic schools but she felt they should teach in state schools and, in fact, she was the first nun to do so. She was told that she shouldn't wear her habit in school. She had to change back into the habit every time she went back to the convent, which wasn't practical so, after a while, she asked if she could wear 'lay' clothes all the time.

When Anne retired from teaching, the order gave her other work to do – in Rome and Brussels, moving from one to the other every three months. She soon discovered this made it impossible for her to do any real work, so the Order sent her back to London.

Anne died of cancer when she was 69. By that time she had learnt computer skills, organised Holy Land visits and she was involved in Jewish-Christian relations. She spent her last four weeks in the hospice of St John & St Elizabeth Hospital. They were so good there: they gave her enough opiates so that she wasn't in any pain but not so much that she couldn't run her own life, and she was even able to take her computer in with her. ■

I become a priest

I APPLIED AT Archbishop's House, Westminster and was sent to Rome for seven years, from 1959 to 1966. That was a very exciting time because it was before, during and after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which addressed relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world. For the first time in 350 years, things were changing tremendously. I went to lectures at the Pontifical Gregorian University, which were all in Latin. The lecturers there were involved in drawing up the documents for the Council, so I was very privileged to learn from them.

I was ordained a priest in 1965 before I finished my studies, along with Crispian Hollis who was also ordained early because they needed priests to say Mass in the villa of the Venerable English College during the summer. The College was where English and Welsh bishops stayed in Rome, so we got to know them well.

After I came back in 1966, I had a bit of time for myself. A friend invited me to his place and asked me to say Mass in the morning at his local chapel. He rang the priest to ask for permission but the local priest wasn't there, it was another priest who was standing in for him. He wanted to check that I was a real priest, so I told him I was ordained in Rome and gave him the name of Crispian Hollis, who was ordained at the same time. Crispian was recorded as being ordained but I wasn't, which made me look very suspicious. I told the priest to ring the bishop's office and the bishop thankfully remembered me from Rome. Knowing the bishop turned out to be quite useful!

I was allocated to Westminster Cathedral. They didn't have a room ready for me, so I was living in Swiss Cottage. The priest said there were a couple of twins that needed baptising the following Sunday, so before I'd even started properly, I was baptising twins. On my first weekend at the cathedral, they gave me nothing to do so I could settle in, which didn't suit me at all. I knew the parish priest next door, so I rang him up to see if he could use me and I ended up saying my first weekend Masses at his parish.

I was there for eight years, until 1974. For the first five years, I was hospital chaplain at what was then the Westminster Hospital, in the area of the cathedral. They allowed me a day-and-a-half away from cathedral duties to go and do all the hospital work, visiting patients plus going round with communions very early on Saturday mornings.

It was difficult work but it was very rewarding, as you really got to know people. When people are in hospital, they don't put on a show or facade, so you see them as they really are. It was a great privilege. Some things were awful. One man who had come from Italy had an eroding ulcer, which meant that his face was eaten away and he had to wear a mask. I used to see him regularly and bring him communion. My predecessor took me around for a day and gave me a very useful piece of advice: get to know the ward sisters. If you have them on your side, then you can work properly. Thankfully, I had a good relationship with all the nurses and ward sisters.

The hospital had around five or six hundred beds, an operating theatre, a maternity ward and a chapel. My predecessor never went into the maternity ward but had leaflets to be handed out to the patients. On one side was a text from scripture and on the other side was information about when the chaplain was available and what he could offer and so on. I too would hand

"It was difficult work but it was very rewarding, as you really got to know people. When people are in hospital, they don't put on a show or facade, so you see people as they really are. It was a great privilege."

out these leaflets to all the Catholic patients. After a few months, the sister from the maternity ward asked for a word and said that the women who had had caesarean operations laughed so much that they almost burst their stitches. I looked at the leaflet and it said, "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy burdened."

The Anglican chaplain asked me why I didn't use the chapel, as it had a system for the service to be relayed to each bed on each ward, so those who couldn't come could still hear it. I had to get permission from the cardinal, but my fellow priests at the cathedral were very upset that a Catholic was saying Mass in an Anglican chapel, although it wasn't a problem for me at all.

On the altar there were thick candles that had burnt down and we needed to get the remaining wax out of the holder in order to replace them with new candles. I went into the operating theatre which was next door, and asked the sister if she had anything to remove the candle wax. She had all of these delicate instruments but none of them worked. Finally, she opened a drawer and found a corkscrew that she used to open bottles of wine. That worked fine!

I used to visit every single patient to say hello. It took a bit longer but it made certain that those who hadn't been to church for a very long time didn't feel embarrassed, as it would be very obvious who the regular church-goers were if I went up to just them. The sister told me of a certain lady in the women's ward who had asked not to see me, so when I went round I skipped her. I suspect she was having an abortion, so didn't want a Catholic priest visiting her, but by not visiting her I probably made her feel more awkward, but that was what the patient wanted so that's what she got. I would have been happy to visit her without judgement.

I was at the hospital for five years. Over the following three years, I was still at the cathedral but looking after a section of the parish which had a chapel of ease (a chapel situated for the convenience of parishioners served by priests from the cathedral), and I was basically the parish priest of that area. I used to knock on all the doors in the local area to find out who the Catholics were. As a result, I got so well known that they put me on the neighbourhood committee, as they said, "Nobody knows this area like you!"

It was amazing what I saw: the sheer poverty in a wealthy part of London, cheek by jowl with places like the House of Lords. One slightly unusual case was of a woman who couldn't leave the house because she had big feet and the women's organisation that helped her didn't have shoes large enough to fit. Luckily, we had a very good St Vincent de Paul Society in the cathedral, so all I had to do was tell the man who ran it that she needed help and then she got her shoes.

There was another woman, a single mother whose front door was broken because she'd lost her keys. The only furniture she had was a portable stove, a television and a bed. Again, through the St Vincent de Paul Society, her flat was furnished within a week or so. These people didn't come and ask for help: they had to be found by knocking on every door.

I remember one man from Edinburgh who was an 'Orangeman,' a very staunch Protestant. I knocked at his door and he invited me in. I said to him if we had been in Northern Ireland he wouldn't have invited me in. He said, "That's right, and you wouldn't have come in either." I've had many experiences like that. People are different when you take them out of their environment. ■

"It was amazing what I saw: the sheer poverty in a wealthy part of London, cheek by jowl with places like the House of Lords."

Moving to East Acton and Enfield . . .

AFTER EIGHT YEARS in the cathedral, I was moved in 1976 to St Aidan's in East Acton. There were two priests there already and I thought I was to be their assistant, but in fact they wanted me to be the chaplain of Hammersmith Hospital. They must have forgotten to tell me that! I thought I'd better do a bit of visiting in the parish, so I knocked on a few doors and told them I was from St Aidan's and about five people said that they went there too. I thought it was odd that it was such a Catholic area but then I realised they didn't mean the church - they were talking about the social club where they drank their beer! It was a pretty rough place: Hammersmith Hospital is right next to Wormwood Scrubs prison - just a wall divides the two.

I was there for two years and then, after five years as Spiritual Director (Chaplain) of the diocesan seminary (where future priests are trained), I was asked to become parish priest of Enfield, one of the very big parishes of the diocese. Within the boundaries of the parish there were two railway lines - one had two stations and the other four. There was a main church in Enfield town; there was the use of an Anglican church in Bush Hill Park; and there was another parish at Holtwhites Hill which was absorbed by Enfield parish. Between those three churches, we had around 2,000 people at Mass every weekend. We were five priests, of which the other four were my assistants.

I stayed in Enfield for eleven years, even though I'd been told I would probably be there for six. The average age of the priests was 60 and the average age of the parishioners was 30, so I suggested to the bishop that the parish needed a younger priest. I was in my fifties at this time. There was an absolute uproar from the ministers of the other churches because we all had a very good relationship and they didn't want me to leave. This included the Salvation Army, Church of England, Methodist, and even Baptist, who normally didn't mix with Catholics! They wrote to the cardinal and asked for me not to be moved. The cardinal actually listened and sent me instead a newly-ordained priest the next year, and another the following year. The year after that, I was able to leave.

The beauty of that parish was that it developed a very strong lay responsibility. The priest before me and the priest before him had nurtured the laity to run things. In those days, the priest would normally do everything - but not in that parish. Later, when one of my successors became a bishop, he publicly acknowledged what the parishioners of Enfield had taught him: that he should allow them to run the place. They weren't rebellious: they were very loyal Catholics and qualified people who did their job. It was a very happy eleven years for me. I still get cards and invitations from the parish.

Several of the parishioners became priests whilst I was in Enfield. We had parish missions, where we invited outside priests to come and encourage people to return to practising their faith. They would go around among the Catholics, visiting their homes and giving special sermons. During the preparation for this, we had to go around the homes ourselves. There was a lady in a nursing home who'd had her legs amputated. They told me she would like to see a priest. She hadn't been to any of the church sacraments for 60 years. I was with her for five minutes, after which she was back to the sacraments and very happy. I said to her, "Can I tell other people about you?" She said, "Tell everybody!" It was noticeable how she changed in just moments. As a priest, to have the gift of being able to change a person's life in five minutes, is tremendous. I heard her confession and gave her absolution and the sacraments of the church.

"It was a very happy eleven years for me. I still get cards and invitations from the parish."

As a priest, you are accepted by many… but not by everybody! I used to go around the parish knocking on doors to find out who's who. One of the people who came to the door was a Spaniard who had grown up during the Spanish Civil War. Franco was very much associated with the Church. This gentleman was against Franco and therefore bitterly against the Church. He told me what he felt and it was a privilege to hear his opinion. Another time when I was going door to door, the police came up to check my identity. Then a few doors on, I came across somebody who was a bit hesitant about me - I think they were the one who rang the police! I had a little chuckle about it.

We had a lot of young people - there were several schools in the parish. They had a movement called *Katimavik*, which is a Canadian Inuit word meaning 'get together'. My predecessor in the parish started this group with one or two people meeting in his sitting-room in the evening. After some weeks, there were too many people for the sitting-room and by the time I arrived, there were nearly one hundred people coming along, aged between 15 to 25. On a particular occasion, one of the youngsters had tried to commit suicide, so the discussion topic they chose was suicide. They were gorgeous young people. They would also hold a Mass on Sunday evening with guitars and singing; it was always packed and the grown-ups came because they enjoyed it too.

That parish is still flourishing, against the trend, although it now has fewer priests. ■

.. . and then to Queensway

FROM ENFIELD I was sent to Queensway, one of the smaller parishes. It was a very unusual church. It was originally a Methodist building, round with nothing on the ground floor. Halfway up is the first floor of the church and then there are two tiers on top of that. The parish had 90 hotels and guesthouses; a lot of the congregation were often visitors to London who would come to church on a Sunday. We therefore got a lot of foreign money in the collection. We needed to get the church reconstructed because it was facing the wrong way and we needed a proper hall, so there was a lot of fundraising done. The usual way of fundraising is to host coffee mornings and things like that, which are a lot of work for the congregation, so I suggested we use the foreign money, which I called 'funny money'. I sorted it out and to anyone who was going on holiday or returning home we would sell it at a discount. We made something like £4,000 a year from this. Over the years I think we raised around £500,000 in that little church, one way or another, just by doing fun things like collecting a million pennies!

One day, a couple arrived before the evening Mass. They said, "We're celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary today. Can you include a prayer for us in the Mass?" which, of course, I did. They were expecting their grown-up daughter to come along afterwards and the three were going to go off for a meal but she wasn't able to come in the end. They were German-speaking but from South Tyrol (Trentino). There is a Tyrolese restaurant nearby so I asked if they would like me to come with them instead. When we got to the restaurant, it was full but because it was their anniversary, I managed to get us a table. It made their day.

The church was also used by the Brazilian, mainly adult, community. The chaplain for the Brazilians had arranged for them to be confirmed. The bishop came along and just before the Mass, he said to the chaplain, "I'd like to meet the people who are going to be confirmed." The chaplain said, "Are you mad?" The bishop said, "I want to meet the six people." The chaplain said, "Six? There are 96!" There had been a clerical error: the bishop had been told there would be six people. In fact, over one hundred turned up. He was too tired by the end to go to a restaurant so we just had a snack in the presbytery. ■

A busy retirement

I WAS AT that church for twelve years and retired from there when I was 75. Since then, I've helped out in all sorts of parishes. I'm retired in the sense that I'm not in control of any parish, but obviously I'm still a priest. I do things now that I couldn't have done as a parish priest because there wasn't time, like interfaith work. I'm basically the chaplain for my whole block (there are 130 flats here!) because neighbours know I'm a priest, so if somebody dies, it's nicer to have somebody you know to do the funeral than a stranger. I've officiated at several funerals for non-Catholics as well.

As a Catholic priest, when you reach 75 you're expected to write to your bishop (in my case, the cardinal) to offer your resignation. I did so and was told, "You're a free man." Then I was asked to do this, that and the other. I said, "Hold on a moment! I want six months without any obligations to reflect on what God wants me to do. Up until now, I have done what the bishop has told me to do, but now I'm retired, it's up to me to find out what I'm supposed to be doing." I asked myself two questions: What does the church need? What can I offer? Then I investigated where the two intersected. I came up with the idea of a ministry for Catholics who have lost their faith; those who have left the church because they have been hurt in some way. I asked around and people agreed that was needed, and that I was a good person to do it as I have 'big ears', meaning that I'm a good listener. I planned it and took it along to the bishop and he said to carry on, but I said that it would need to be done officially by the Church.

"I'm basically the chaplain for my whole block (there are 130 flats here!) because neighbours know I'm a priest, so if somebody dies, it's nicer to have somebody you know to do the funeral than a stranger."

If somebody came to me, they needed to be coming to me as a representative of the Church - not just a nice bloke reconciling them but the Church reconciling them. After a while, the bishop saw my point of view and changed the name to the Ministry to Alienated Catholics. I put posters in the various churches and saw around 30 or 40 people, most of whom just needed one talk and they were back in the church. God works through that sort of thing. Lay people had done the hard work beforehand; the people I spoke with were just waiting for an invitation. I would ask where they were comfortable meeting and often as not we'd meet in a Wetherspoon pub! We'd have a cup of coffee and they'd tell their story. If they wanted it, I'd give them absolution there and then and that was it – they left happy. I got people from Australia and other places writing to me because the news spread.

I did that work until Pope Francis called for a Jubilee Year of Mercy, which was basically what I was doing. If the project was becoming mainstream, there was no point in my duplicating it and starting an empire when the whole Church was already doing it. Occasionally, I still get people contacting me and I'm still willing to go and speak to them.

I was always involved, even at school, in studying the faith and passing on my belief to others. My background has enabled me to reach out to the Jewish strand. In a sense, I'm like a tree with two roots - my Christian roots, my religion; and my Jewish roots, my ancestors. It's not a conflict; they mingle and make one. I feel that's my vocation, to be on the fringe of both of them and make the Catholics less antisemitic and the Jews less afraid of Catholicism and the cross, as the cross can be quite frightening to Jews. I can reconcile people just by being what I am. I've been to several of the events run by the local Liberal synagogue because several of the members know me. The very fact that they've invited me shows that they regard me not as an infiltrator or an enemy but as a link. ■

Musings and insights

I THINK IN order to have a good religious basis you need three influences - the home, the school, and the church - working in harmony. Everyone should be free to make a choice at some stage in their life. If their choice is not to go to church or to believe in God, then that should be their free choice.

When I was at Westminster Cathedral, I was asked to help some youngsters prepare for the sacraments. I knew that one of them came from a secular, non-believing background. She had to do a written paper so I set the paper in such a way that she could put her real beliefs and not be marked down, but she was too young to take that seriously and she put down what she thought I wanted to hear, rather than what she really believed.

I have so many good memories. I had a group of grown-ups who were thinking about becoming Catholics. It was a very mixed bag. There was a garbage collector in the group. He didn't make any bones about his job or give himself a different title. After I taught them, I would ask if they had followed what I was saying and he would say, 'No!' He was a Godsend to the group because the others hadn't followed me either, but didn't have the courage to say so. We took those who decided to become Catholic to the cathedral to be received into the church and confirmed. That was a great group. I've kept in touch with a number of them.

I was a member of the *Kindertransport* group from the very beginning when it was founded by Bertha Leverton in the late 1980s. I was brought in by my sister who was very involved in Jewish-Christian relations. After the group was absorbed by the AJR I stayed a member and still am to this day. I'm Jewish by blood but not by religion. I have occasionally spoken to school groups about my life, and attended events at the liberal synagogue in St John's Wood. I help Jewish people realise there were also non-Jewish people on the *Kindertransport* – I feel it's my role to network the two sides together.

In 2019 Austrian TV made a programme about the *Kindertransport* and came to interview me along with a couple of other *kinder*. It all came to the surface because of the 80th anniversary

and they knew there wasn't much time left to get the stories. I think I have an obligation to say yes to these things.

I have thought about it quite a bit and came to the conclusion that I don't have a message for future generations. We know what we ought to be doing, but we don't do it. We haven't learnt from the past. I wonder whether we need to get back to involving religions in the running of things, because all religions say they want peace, harmony and understanding. We see religion sometimes as a source of conflict, but I wonder if we need to use it to solve conflict.

To the young people who left school in order to protest against the damaging of the environment I say, 'Well done!' My generation would never have thought of anything like that. They'll make some mistakes and might need slapping on the wrists occasionally, but we all need that sometimes. The generosity of young people puts me to shame. I've seen them kneel down to talk to beggars in the street.

The refugees of today don't need me to say anything to them. They know what they need. They want security, they want shelter, the possibility of work. But they're not getting it. They're not allowed in. I don't think it's the refugees who need my advice, rather the politicians. There are groups which help child refugees from Syria, for example. That's what I support. If someone is drowning, you don't give them advice. ■

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Hobbies and travels

THESE DAYS MY main hobby is cryptic crossword puzzles - the ones that are challenging and very involved. They are not easy, but that's why I like them. I usually do the one in *The Times.* Sometimes I send in the Saturday puzzle, but I only won once, about 15 years ago!

I read and I like to go out to eat with friends. I still carry out priestly activities, meeting fellow priests for further training.

My sister loved to travel but I never liked it. I did go to Israel with her in 1976 – she organized a two-week group tour. We stayed for a week on an Orthodox kibbutz (most kibbutz are secular communal settlements) in the Galilee. This particular kibbutz was founded by pious Jews from Manchester whom my sister knew and she arranged for us to stay there. Their main activity was making benches for synagogues. From there, we took coach tours to various churches and places where Jesus had worked in the Galilee. My sister was a Sister of Sion and they have a home on the Via Dolorosa in the Old City of Jerusalem. We stayed there during our second week and toured the area, including the Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Desert, which was built where it is believed Moses got the Ten Commandments. Our group flew to Sinai and then Eilat and back to Jerusalem in three little seven-seater planes. I was in the first one and there was a thunderstorm which we flew right through. The other two planes were warned and flew above the storm. The rain was so heavy that we couldn't land – we had to circle around until it was safe to do so. It was exciting!

"Our group flew to Sinai and then Eilat and back to Jerusalem in three little seven-seater planes. I was in the first one and there was a thunderstorm which we flew right through."

I've been to America to visit relatives and friends in Philadelphia, upstate New York, New Jersey, Denver and Washington DC. When I was in the seminary, one of the priests got ordained in Florida, so I went there. I always enjoyed it when I went but I don't like the travelling part.

I like music but I don't really listen much. I was brought up with music in Vienna – children's operas and so on. I had to play the piano. I have been given a good voice and I was trained to sing, so I used it. Now I sing at Mass but with the congregation, not in the choir.

My perfect day? I like change. I wouldn't like the same each day because there are so many different things to experience. Even the things which are not good, you can still get something positive out of them. ■

And now?

I'VE REACHED THE stage in life where I'm not looking to add to things like interests and hobbies. I'm at the stage where I'm reducing. I'm still living a pretty active life but that's going to stop at some stage or other. Either I'll go with a bang, but more likely I will go down slowly. That means I won't be able to do active things and I need to prepare for that time of just being still, praying, listening to God. That doesn't come naturally to me because I've been always active and giving and I shall have to be passive and receiving. I will need to learn the ability to just be silent, to not read, to not talk. I have to learn to not resent not being able to do other things but to embrace it. ■

AJR The Association of Jewish Refugees

About the AJR

Founded in 1941 by Jewish refugees from Central Europe, The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) is the national charity representing and supporting Holocaust refugees and survivors living in Great Britain. Primarily delivering social, welfare and care services, the AJR has a nationwide network of regional groups offering members a unique opportunity to socialise in their local area. Members receive support from volunteers and can obtain advice and assistance on welfare rights as well as on Holocaust reparations.

The AJR is committed to the education of future generations about the Holocaust and is now the UK's largest benefactor of education and memorialisation programmes and projects which promote teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

About 70,000 refugees, including approximately 10,000 children on the *Kindertransport*, arrived in Great Britain from Nazi-occupied Europe in the 1930s. The AJR extends membership to anyone who fled a Nazi-occupied country as a Jewish refugee or who arrived in Great Britain as a Holocaust survivor. We also welcome the descendants and spouses of the refugees as members.

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www.ajr.org.uk