Introduction

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This collection is based on the papers given at the 14th Limerick Conference in Irish-German Studies, “Context of Kristallnacht: Ireland and the German-speaking refugees 1933–45 – A colloquium on German-speaking exiles, Irish helpers and the national and international context seventy-five years ago”. The event, organised by the Centre for Irish-German Studies, took place at the University of Limerick on 7/8 November 2013. Several aspects were at the core of the conference – to remind us again of what happened on these days three quarters of a century earlier, in November 1938, the violence and barbarity, the incarceration of tens of thousands of mostly Jewish men. The conference also focused on the impact these events had on Ireland, looking at the people who came here as refugees on the one hand but also identifying some of the Irish groups and individuals who reached out and helped. The voices of the refugees and helpers, often remembered only by their family members, were combined with the voices of academics who presented current research on Nazi Germany, refugees in Ireland and Great Britain, and Irish policy towards them.

What awareness of these events in Germany and Austria existed in Ireland at the time? At least in terms of media coverage in November 1938, it would have been hard to overlook. There was considerable Irish newspaper reporting about Kristallnacht (sometimes also called Pogromnacht, “Crystal Night” or “Night of the Broken Glass” due to the many broken windows and extensive destruction), which occurred on 9 November (though it continued in many places for longer). Initial reports on Thursday, 10 November, were not given much prominence, nor would they have caused much alarm in the context of the time. On page nine of the Irish Times, a short article under the headlines “Jewish Shops Sacked – Destruction In Munich – Police and Fire Brigade Restore Order” reported that windows of Jewish shops were smashed and the Bersfeld synagogue was burned down (“the third attack on a synagogue, the others taking place yesterday in Cassel and Bebra”), but no real awareness of the scale of destruction would have been possible, especially as the impression was given that order had been restored. Underneath, another short article (headed “Death of Shot Diplomat – French Condolence in Berlin”) mentioned a “small demonstration” that took place in Berlin. The next day this changed: under the title “Fire and Wrecking in Germany: Jews’ Day Of Trial – Synagogues Razed – Looting Shops – Books and Garments of Rabbi Torn to Pieces”, the Irish Times reported on 11 November 1938: “Amazing reports of excesses on an unparalleled scale poured in from all parts of Germany – reports of the burning of synagogues, the demolition of Jewish stores, the plundering of private property, and the arrest of probably thousands of Jews. [… ] The wrecking was watched, in the main, by silent

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1 Arguably the most correct description is the expression Novemberpogrome, as it focuses on the anti-Jewish attacks and does not give the incorrect impression that it was confined to one night. However, the sheer scale of destruction and violence against Jews that night did present one of the most important turning points in Nazi anti-Semitic policy and the term Kristallnacht has therefore been used both in popular reference and in academic writing to encapsulate the “spontaneous” attacks on buildings and people that were not hampered by police and the arrest of up to 30,000 Jewish males in their aftermath.
crowds.” The reporting was continued four pages later under the title “Havoc in Germany”, a theme that was continued the next day, when the heading was “Anti-Jewish Havoc in Germany”. That day, some of the reaction abroad about the atrocities also featured in an article several pages later on “Anti-Nazi Threats and Demonstrations”, informing the Irish Times readers that anti-Nazi demonstrations had taken place in New York and Boston and that German consulates had received threats that they would be blown up.

Taking up the German anti-Semitic curse Judah verrecke! as a title, readers were left in no doubt about the violence and the suffering of the victims:

Jewish shops were looted and their owners beaten; one synagogue at least was set on fire; every outrage that the mob mind could devise appears to have been directed against the unhappy Jews. This ferocity did not end with dawn. It persisted throughout Thursday, with the result that one correspondent can describe a Main Street of Munich as “looking as if it had been raided by a bombing aeroplane”. [...] The mobs of the various cities were informed that they were at liberty to handle the Jews as they liked.

Likewise the Irish Independent reported in detail about pogroms in Germany and Austria, culminating in a review of the events on 14 November with a biting critique of the reluctance of governments to speak out against the brutalities – reported here, interestingly, as though committed not only against Jews but also against Catholics in Austria (a very unusual reference in the reporting overall) and ending with an equally surprising reference to a protest by the Vatican:

Nazi Infamies
Last week, as a reprisal for the murder of a German official in Paris by a Polish Jew, the Nazis were given a free hand to burn, plunder and pillage the Houses of Worship and the homes of Jews all over Germany. One would have thought that, even for shame, the Nazi authorities would, at least, have pretended to frown upon this orgy of crime. But their code of morality is unique, fortunately for the human race. [...] All over the world public opinion has been shocked with indignation at the atrocities of the Nazis. Such protests are likely to have little effect; a mad dog will not be stayed in his course by the cries of the bystanders. The decrepit League of Nations which was so solicitous for the Abyssinians will show little concern for the Catholics and Jews of Austria. [...] The dignity of the human race has been outraged by the crimes of the Germans whose coldblooded tyrannies are rapidly putting them outside the pale of civilised races. It is strange and sad that no secular Government, great or small, has yet thought fit to protest in the name of civilisation. But it is consoling to realise that the Voice of the Vatican has not been silent.

At the Limerick conference, the historical facts as well as current academic

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2 Though the text indicated that the police now “seemed in perfect control” and that the appeal by Goebbels to “immediately stop any further anti-Jewish demonstrations” was broadcast again. Irish Times, 11 November 1938, p. 11.
3 Cf. Irish Times, 12 November 1938, p. 15.
4 Ibid., p. 8.
5 See for example Irish Independent, 12 November 1938, p. 2: “The Nazi Party had made the shooting in Paris of a German diplomat the pretext for the most ferocious pogrom which Europe, west of the Vistula, had witnessed since the Middle Ages, said Sir Archibald Sinclair, leader of the Liberal Opposition, at Northampton, last night. [...] Vile outbursts of frenzied barbarism.”
6 Indeed, the Vatican remained generally silent on the events in Germany and Austria, while some days later the US ambassador to Germany, Hugh Wilson, was recalled, though diplomatic relations were retained.
7 Irish Independent, 14 November 1938, p. 10. One page later, the headline “War on Jews and Catholics – More Nazi Outrages” again reinforces the view that Catholics were as targeted as Jews in Germany and Austria.
discussions on questions such as the planning and involvement of key Nazi figures in the Kristallnacht events were provided by Professor Anthony McElligott, one of the leading researchers in the English-speaking world on Germany history in the first half of the twentieth century. Professor Ian Wallace, one of the founders of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies in London, provided the context of British exile studies and specifically the response of Great Britain to Kristallnacht, including the Kindertransport, which provided refuge for 10,000 children in the UK. Dr Siobhán O’Connor focused on the Irish situation, looking at public and policy responses towards the exiles. Dr David O’Donoghue looked at another German-speaking group in Ireland, specifically the group with leanings to National Socialist ideas and its influence in 1930s Ireland. These historical and academic contextualisations are important and, with the exception of the events in Germany, not widely known.

However, at the heart of both the conference and this volume are personal experiences and reflections. Right from the start, from the Austrian Ambassador’s greeting, it was clear that the conference was covering new ground, exploring previously uncharted areas and allowing very personal stories to be passed on for the first time. Harald Seibel, First Secretary of the German Embassy, addressed the conference on behalf of the German Ambassador, who was unable to attend. The main focus then was on the thoughts and reminiscences of refugees who came to Ireland and their family members – Stephen Weil concentrating on the cultural contexts of his father and grandfather’s experiences; Klaus Unger writing about his father’s experience and legacy; Professor Hans Reiss giving us an insight into his first experiences in Ireland where he arrived in 1939, having just turned 17. Herbert Karrach, who was included in the conference by video recording (he was spending the winter, as usual, with his daughter Rachel in Nepal), recounts the experiences he and his parents had when they came to Ireland. Sophia Kingshill and her brother Danny write about their grandparents Willi and Trudi Königsberger in Tipperary; Paul Dubsky recounts his father’s experiences of coming to Ireland as a teenager; and Denis Henderson rounds off the recollections with a portrait of his mother, Ruth Henderson, and her parents, Peter and Else Brandenburg. Almost all of these personal reflections are published here for the first time and will hopefully form the basis for further publications by the respective authors. Hans Reiss, Sophia Kingshill and Denis Henderson did not speak at the conference but kindly agreed to add to this volume. A memoir of Hans Kohlseisen, who contributed to the conference via Skype from Vienna and spoke about his time in Ireland, is currently being prepared in German.

There are not many witnesses left to the events of 1938. We were fortunate to hear and see some of them at the conference. The urgency of this undertaking was emphasised at the conference, as the children of the refugees and the children of the Irish helpers, who have personal memories of refugees, are no longer teenagers. Some of the grandchildren are close to retiring. Indeed, for many of the first-hand witnesses it is too late. One of the scheduled speakers, Thomas Ticher, son of Kurt and Ellen Ticher (German immigrants to Ireland from the 1920s who provided refuge for their

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8 Hans Reiss’s contribution follows to some extent his memoirs, which appeared in German in 2009 under the title Erinnerungen aus 85 Jahren (Regensburg: Petrarca).
nephews, supported two other refugee children and helped several other refugees in different ways), died suddenly two months before the conference, aged 84. He had been very enthusiastic about informing a wider audience about his parents’ efforts. Another sad loss was the death of Maurice Abrahamson in January 2014. Maurice had helped his father, Leonard Abrahamson (chair of the Central Jewish Refugee Aid Committee formed in Dublin in December 1938 in the aftermath of Kristallnacht), to gather financial support for Jewish refugees coming to Ireland. His passing has led to the topic of Jewish helpers being given less emphasis in this volume than it should have. Fortunately the contribution by Dr Kevin McCarthy looks at the remarkable achievements and work of Robert Briscoe, Ireland’s only Jewish TD at the time. The Quakers and their outstanding help are remembered by Philip Jacob and Glynn Douglas, whose families were very much involved with refugee support. Glynn Douglas covers the situation in Northern Ireland, which is also where Michael Kennedy’s family lived; he writes about the boy they took in, Werner Cahn-Garnier. A change of perspective is brought in by Mary Rose Doorly, whose 1994 book Hidden Memories (Dublin, Blackwater Press) gathered together, in some cases for the first time, personal recollections of survivors and witnesses to the Holocaust living in Ireland. The story of Sabina Wizniak from that collection, included here, was updated with the support of Sabina’s son, Ivor Shorts. One poignant aspect of her experiences, the story of an Irish official who was supposed to arrange her deportation – she being an illegal alien at the time – but who turned a ‘blind eye’ instead, was the inspiration for Irish writer Hugo Hamilton, who wrote a film script about it (shot with Emily Behr and Ardal O’Hanlon in 2007). The script of Blind Eye is published here for the first time. Together with the poem by Irish poet and academic Gerald Dawe on Kristallnacht, Blind Eye is an example how the events seventy-five years ago continue to impact on literary and cultural imagination even in countries such as Ireland that seemed relatively untouched.

Experiences of Kristallnacht and personal engagement with its legacy are at the core of the next two contributions. Yanky Fachler came to Ireland decades later, started the Jewish Historical Society of Ireland and is involved in Ireland’s annual Holocaust Memorial Day. He writes about the background of Kristallnacht and the strong impact it had on his family. And a personal encounter with George Clare, whose excellent memoir Last Waltz in Vienna was often referred to at the conference, led Professor Eoin Bourke to instigate the conferring of an honorary doctorate on him, one of the few public appreciations given to former refugees. This volume will hopefully also contribute to that public recognition, as well as adding the often overlooked dimension of the helpers.

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MA in Irish-German Studies, the German Embassy, and the research fund of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Limerick. Most of all I want to thank all contributors to this volume, with whom it was a great pleasure and honour to work.

There are more refugees in the world right now than there have ever been since World War II. This book is dedicated to all refugees and the people who help them.