

A Young Victim of World War II

Working on the Oswestry town cemetery project, the surnames 'Jones', 'Evans', 'Hughes', 'Williams' etc. become old friends, so when I came across the surname 'Apotecker' my interest was piqued. The entry in the burial register provides the following information:

Entry number 12500; Name *Bernd Apotecker*; Description of Person buried *Refugee (Minor)*; Age *12 years*; Place where death occurred *Morda Hospital, Oswestry*; Date of Burial *February 2nd 1940*

12 497	Edwin Richard Smith	Railway Signaller	65 years	Forkhill Morda Oswestry	31 st	Swivel From	X	53	General	Oswestry	Free Buried	24 th Interment
12 498	Ellie Elizabeth Day	Spinster	36 th years	Pitten Street Oswestry	20 th	St. Mary's	X	178	General	Holy Trinity	Free Buried	18 th Interment
12 499	Ellen Pearce	Spinster	40 th years	Berrington Hospital	1 st	St. Mary's	Y	217	Consecrated	Shroveton	Free Buried	18 th Interment
12 500	Bernd Apotecker	Refugee (Minor)	12 years	Morda Hospital Oswestry	2 nd	St. Mary's	X	290	General	Oswestry	Free Buried	18 th Interment
12 501	Wilfred Murrell Evans	Dairy Farmer	49 years	Cart House	2 nd	St. Mary's	G	40	General	Oswestry	Free Buried	18 th Interment
12 502	Mary Jane Hathers	Widow	76 th years	3 Stewart Road	5 th	St. Mary's	Y	150	Consecrated	Holy Trinity	Free Buried	18 th Interment
12 503	John Henry Jones	Retired Fireman	66 years	11 West Street	5 th	Swivel From	X	172	General	Oswestry	Free Buried	2 nd Interment
12 504	Sarah Mills											

My next stop was the Border Counties Advertiser where, in the issue dated 7th February 1940, I found the following entry:

'YOUNG REFUGEE'S DEATH. – There will be many people among the subscribers to the Mayor of Oswestry's Fund for Refugee Children who will regret to hear of the death of Bernd Apotecker, 11-year old Jewish-German refugee, which took place in the Morda Infirmary on Tuesday, Jan. 29th. Living with Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Sweeney, he had attended Morda School. Where he had been made welcome and happy. He was proud, too, of being a Boy Scout, and wore his uniform on every permissible occasion....'

The article went on to say that arrangements had been made for a Rabbi Steinberg to come from Liverpool to say prayers for the young boy, but at the last moment the Rabbi was unable to attend because of illness, so the Vicar of St. Oswalds, Preb. E. Moore Darling, held a 'simple funeral service' in the church. Those attending the service were:

'foster-parents, committee officials, school-master and Scoutmaster, and they, side by side with the only representatives of the Jewish faith, adult German refugees, and the three little lads who had been Bernd's companions in exile....'

YOUNG REFUGEE'S DEATH. – There will be many people among the subscribers to the Mayor of Oswestry's Fund for Refugee Children who will regret to hear of the death of Bernd Apotecker, 11-year old Jewish-German refugee, which took place in the Morda Infirmary on Tuesday, Jan. 29th. Living with Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Sweeney, he had attended Morda School, where he had been made welcome and happy. He was proud, too, of being a Boy Scout, and wore his uniform on every permissible occasion. The simple funeral service at the Parish Church on Friday week was taken by the Vicar, Preb. E. Moore Darling, in the absence of Rabbi Steinberg, of Liverpool, who was unable through illness to be present. The few English friends gathered there included foster-parents, committee officials, school-master and Scoutmaster, and they, side by side with the only representatives of the Jewish faith, adult German refugees, and the three little lads who had been Bernd's companions in exile, joined in the beautiful simplicity of the service. Burial took place in Oswestry Cemetery, among those present being Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Son, Mr. and Mrs. Hill, Miss Coatsworth, Mr. Wallace Pugh, Eric Coatsworth (representing the Boy Scouts), and several refugees. Floral tributes were received from Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Fred, Elise, Gerda and Gerd, Mr. and Mrs. Hill, Miss Coatsworth, Mr. and Mrs. Coatsworth, Infants' Morda School, Evangelists, Morda School, Eric and Norman Coatsworth, the Refugee Committee, Mr. S. Bailey, The Hospital, 2nd Oswestry Scouts, Messrs. David Davies and Sons carried out the funeral arrangements.

Afterwards, Bernd's body was interred in the town cemetery. The location of the plot was always known, but nothing marked his resting place; however this is not the end of his story.

In July 2004 an article appeared in the 'Kindertransport Newsletter' referring to Bernd. It stated:

'There is the possibility he had a sister named Nicu Apotecker who was 16½ at the time and the address given was Berlin-Schoenberg, Heylstr. 5. There is no headstone. Recently a lady from the Jewish Genealogical Society, Lorna Kaye, found out about it, notified the local Rabbi. Discussions were held about reburying him in a Jewish cemetery, but it was decided instead to erect a headstone over his grave.'

The next edition of 'Kindertransport Newsletter' carried the following update with regard to Bernd:

'On Sunday 22nd August at 11.30am there was a dedication ceremony and I'chaim ^[1]. Robert Bergman (one of the Kinder in Manchester) recited the Kaddish ^[2]. '

An editorial note then followed saying:

'We have alerted the Chief Rabbi's office of the fact that a Jewish child is buried in a Christian cemetery and that a Jewish lady in Oswestry would like to put a headstone on his grave there. We were told to leave this matter for them to sort out, because of the Halachic^[3] issues.'

This was finally followed by a letter to the editor from a Frank G. Marshall, which read as follows:

'I will, as requested, give you a few details as I remember them regarding Bernd. I was very friendly with his brother Nicu (not sister) as we lived opposite each other in the Heyl Strasse in Berlin. I am not sure about the mother but their father came from Romania, and both boys were born in Germany. I knew that Bernd went to England but never knew his address so was unable to contact him after my arrival here on the 22 August 1939.

The father went at some time before the war to Paris but was not heard of again. I have a letter written by Nicu on the 20 February 1940, in which he tells me that his father is OK, but they have not heard from Bernd for a long time (please note the date). Finally I heard from my mother who was still in Berlin that Nicu and his mother were lured into a trap by being asked to meet someone at a Berlin Station, but were never heard of again.'

I am at least happy to say that a stone was erected on Bernd's grave and I went to visit him only



a few days ago. In keeping with the Jewish custom, I placed a small pebble on his grave. There are many explanations regarding this custom but the one I like is that symbolically, it suggests the continuing presence of love and memory which are as strong and enduring as a rock. I do feel very strongly that this little boy should not be forgotten.

Notes:

- [1] L'chaim in Hebrew is a toast meaning "to life".
- [2] The Kaddish is a prayer that praises God and expresses a yearning for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The emotional reactions inspired by the Kaddish come from the circumstances in which it is said: it is recited at funerals and by mourners and sons are required to say Kaddish for eleven months after the death of a parent.
- [3] Referring to the body of Jewish law supplementing the scriptural law and forming especially the legal part of the Talmud

Sources:

Oswestry Town Cemetery Burial Register
Border Counties Advertiser dated 7th February 1940
Kindertransport Newsletter AJR Special Interest Section July/August 2004 edition
Kindertransport Newsletter AJR Special Interest Section September/October 2004 edition

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