

Tony O'Herlihy, Jutta Ströter-Bender,
Kulturamt Saarbrücken (Hg.)

Das Danke-Buch aus Saarbrücken, 1946 Eine Erinnerung an den Hungerwinter

Zeichnungen, Briefe und Gedichte
von Mädchen in der Nachkriegszeit



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herausgegeben von
Tony O'Herlihy
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Abb. 1: Juliane Kurz, April 2019, in Dublin mit dem Original des Danke-Buches.
Foto: Jutta Ströter-Bender.

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Grußwort

Zwischen Kartonplatten mit Schnur gebunden wurde im Jahr 1946 ein kleines Danke-Buch von Schülerinnen der damaligen Saarbrücker Mädchenmittelschule „Cecilienschule“ gestaltet. Als Ausdruck des Dankes für Nahrungshilfen wurde es nach Irland geschickt, von wo es nach 65 Jahren im Jahr 2012 durch die Nachforschungen seines irischen Finders Tony O’Herlihy wieder nach Saarbrücken zurückfand. Das „Saarbrücker Danke-Buch“ wurde als Reproduktion in das Stadtarchiv aufgenommen und ist Teil des Gedächtnisses unserer Stadt geworden.

Ein Stück Stadtgeschichte wird in den Zeichnungen und Texten lebendig. Mit schwarzem Stift gemalte Trümmerhäuser und zerbombte Straßenzüge berühren tief, aber die Cecilienschülerinnen des Nachkriegsjahres 1946 haben den Krieg überlebt. Die Nahrungshilfen in ihren Schulen ermöglichten Mahlzeiten mit lebensnotwendigen Speisen. Hiervon berichten Buchseiten voller farbenfroher Zeichnungen, die dampfende Suppentöpfe im Klassenzimmer zeigen und Schiffe, die Säcke voller Fett, Mehl, Kakao und Speck nach Saarbrücken transportiert haben und nun am Saarufer ausgeladen werden.

Das „Saarbrücker Danke-Buch“ ist ein historisch bedeutsamer Fund, es zeigt, wie Kin-

der und junge Menschen Zeitzeugenschaft ablegen. Ihr Blick auf die kriegsgeprägte Lebenswelt ist unverstellt und emotional authentisch. Das Danke-Buch als Dokument ergänzt das Wissen um die Saarbrücker Nachkriegszeit, indem es Einblick gibt in die internationale humanitäre Hilfe durch Schulspeisungen der Schweiz und Irlands.

Mein besonderer Dank gilt den Zeitzeuginnen – den früheren Cecilienschülerinnen und Gestalterinnen des „Saarbrücker Danke-Buchs“ – für ihre langjährige Unterstützung der Forschungen zu ihrem Buch.

Die Landeshauptstadt Saarbrücken begrüßt die aktuellen Bemühungen für die Aufnahme des „Saarbrücker Danke-Buchs“ in das UNESCO Weltdokumentenerbe.



Uwe Conradt, Bürgermeister
der Stadt Saarbrücken



Abb. 1: Der Danke-Brunnen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Stadtpark von Dublin.

Die Anlage Die drei Nornen / Three Fates befindet sich in der südwestlichen Ecke des St Stephen's Green. 1956 wurden die Skulpturen durch den Bildhauer Josef Wackerle gestaltet. 1997 erfolgte die Anbringung einer Bronzetafel am Brunnenrand. Teilschrift: „Aus Dankbarkeit für die Hilfe, die das irische Volk deutschen Kindern nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg gewährte.“ Roman Herzog, Präsident der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Foto: Jutta Ströter-Bender.

Tony O’Herlihy

The story of the “Danke-Buch” and its rediscovery

Das Danke-Buch consists of 92 pages of simple drawings, some in plain pencil, some coloured, together with letters and short poems, from the children of the Cecilienschule in Saarbrücken.

The little book is held together between speckled cardboard covers with a piece of string, and while it may have been put together from coarse austerity materials, there is an enchanting richness to the warm, sometimes vivid colours and the illustrations which would not be out of place in a book of children’s fairytales.

Das Danke-Buch was organised and assembled by a teacher at the Cecilienschule who encouraged the girls, aged between 6 and 12, each to contribute a page thanking the people of Ireland for “Die Irische Spende – The Irish Donations”, consisting mainly of food and also some clothing which was distributed to them during the winter of 1945 /1946.

In fact, Irish aid was still being distributed in Germany as late as 1953. Other areas receiving aid were France, Northern Italy, Austria, Hungary, Belgium and Holland.

Between 1942 and 1945, the city of Saarbrücken was regularly bombed, and by the end of the war, 1250 of a population of approximately 120,000 had been killed, 11,000 homes were destroyed, 75% of the city was in ruins and 50,000 people were homeless.

Das Danke-Buch was given to my late wife, Mary, when she was aged 10/11 years, in or around 1954/55. She was delighted to have it to keep, but unfortunately in later life she could not remember who had given it to her. While researching the background of the little book, I have, as yet, been unable to discover how it came to be in Ireland.

Following Mary’s death on 11th August 2011, I started on the journey to research its background.

I went to the National Library, Kildare Street, Dublin, where I first learned about the “Save the German Children Society”, an organisation started and led by Dr. Kathleen Murphy.

This Society was later amalgamated into the “Irish Red Cross”, which ultimately bore the responsibility for “Operation Shamrock”, which brought about 1000 German children

to Ireland to be fostered by Irish families with whom they generally lived for two to three years before returning to Germany and their families.

Several of the "Operation Shamrock" (cf Molohan 1998) children never returned to Germany and were formally adopted by their Irish families and continued to live in Ireland.

With the assistance of the German Embassy in Dublin and the Saarbrücken Cultural Office under the direction of Frau Birgit Kollet, 31 surviving Ladies or their families were contacted, and on 13th April 2013, I travelled to Saarbrücken to meet with 23 of the ladies and their families in the building which has replaced the original school. It was for many of the Ladies the first time they met since leaving school.

I was later contacted by German Historian Dr. Bernd Haunfelder, who has researched Swiss aid to Germany following the end of the war. His book "Children's Train to Switzerland" (2007) is about the forgotten chapter of post-war aid to Germany when the Swiss Red Cross arranged for about 181,000 malnourished and sick children to be cared for and about 44,000 to be fostered by Swiss families after 1946. He told me that he had seen other, similar Danke-Bücher in the archives of the International Red Cross, but this one is, he believes, the only example of one to the Irish People and may also be one of few which were not kept by the Red Cross in Switzerland.

While researching the Irish National Archives, I began to realise the extent of aid sent to France, Germany, Northern Italy, Austria, Hungary, Belgium and Holland following the end of the war in 1945.

The war in Europe ended on 8th May 1945, and 10 days later, the Dail (Irish Parliament) voted an allocation of £ 3,000,000 in value of goods to be sent for the relief of hunger and distress in Europe, this figure in today's terms equates to approximately € 127,000,000, and in the following year, 1946, voted a further £ 1,500,000 / € 64,000,000. A total of € 191,000,000. This £ 4.5 million was at the time approximately equivalent to £ 1.25 each man, woman and child for our population of 3.5 million and at a time when the average weekly wage was £ 8.00.

I should make it clear that we sent only food and goods which resulted in the rations of sugar, butter and meat here in Ireland being cut. Some sums of money were also voted to the Irish Red Cross to pay for transport and distribution to the recipient areas.

The following is an extract from the official Dail Report Vol. 97, No. 7, dated 18th May 1945, of a statement which An Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon DeValera made to the Dail (Parliament):

"Deputies do not need to be reminded of the terrible conditions prevailing over the Continent. Millions of people are starving and many more millions are threatened with starvation. Here in Ireland we have made several efforts to contribute our small share, but we have encountered insuperable difficulties, mainly transport.

I now come to what we propose to do in the future. I have here a list of articles of food and clothing, and of livestock to the value of some £ 3,000,000 (a further £ 1.5 m was voted the following year 1946), which pro-

vided no unforeseen circumstances arise; we are ready to send to Europe for the relief of distress assuming we are able to obtain the necessary transport. I wish to make this offer publicly here in the name of our country, so that countries in need may know what we have to offer.

It will involve a reduction in our rations of some commodities, but the sacrifice involved will, I'm sure, be readily accepted by our people to help fellow-beings in dire distress.

Some of the items we are prepared to supply in the period from May to December 1945 are as follows:

Live cattle for immediate slaughter – 20,000 head

Draft Horses – 1,500

Bacon – 16,000 cwt. (813.000 kg). This will involve a reduction in home supplies.

Canned Meat – 10,000,000 lbs. (4.500.000 kg) (This is over and above our exports to GB presently 22,500,000 lbs.) (10.200.000 kg)

Butter – 20,000 cwt. (1.000.000 kg) (This resulted in maintaining the current ration of 6ozs / week for a further year)

Dried Milk – 1,000 cwt. (50,000 kg)

Condensed Milk – 5,000cwt. (250.000 kg)

Cheese – 5,000 cwt. (250.000 kg)

Sugar – 200,000 cwt. (10.200.000 kg) (This quantity was released from stock held by the Sugar Company resulting in a reduction in rations from 3/4lb – 1/2lb per week)

Blankets – 100,000

Although home supplies were not good it should be possible to release 100,000 lbs of Hosiery yarn in the form of 16,000 knitted undergarments for Children and 20,000 doz. Woollen socks and 5,000 woollen gloves as well as 50,000 lbs of hand-knitting yarn.

Baby Foods – 50 tons patent barley

Stoves and Cookers – 500.”

Opposition Deputy James Dillon said:

“The whole world emerging from the maelstrom of war and the hatreds engendered by war, may be misled into forgetting that all men are our neighbours, and that a hungry German is as much deserving of pity as a hungry Pole, and if a woman or her Children are afflicted in the territory of the Reich, they are as much a charge upon our charity as would be an oppressed and afflicted person in Poland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark or Norway.”

An indication of the deprivations of life in Germany at the time is contained in a letter dated 12th November 1946 from a manager in the Siemens Berlin office to Henri Broekhoven, Siemens Managing Director Ireland, which read, “I should not like to leave unmentioned how moved I was in recent days

to read in the newspaper here of a gift by the people of Ireland to the City of Berlin of 2000 cattle and a quantity of sugar for the relief of the population. This generous humanitarian act, and the spirit of concern it expresses in our present circumstances must have our sincere thanks.”

The main problem for the Government at the time was how to get all this aid to mainland Europe, due to the severe shortage of ships and of course the road and rail infrastructure of Europe being almost completely destroyed. The proportions of the Aid that would be distributed to each country, France, Italy, Germany and Austria etc., was debated, and it was finally decided that 15% each would go to France, Belgium and Italy with the balance being distributed by the International Red Cross in Switzerland to Germany, Austria, Hungary and the other devastated countries.

During the course of my research, I was contacted by Robert Hope of Athena Media, who conceived and produced a radio documentary titled “The Kinder Letters”, broadcast on national radio Newstalk on 19th September 2015.

The making of the documentary resulted in meeting again with Dr. Michael Kennedy RIA, a most informative and interesting visit to the Jewish Museum here in Dublin, in a visit to Berlin to meet with Irish Ambassador Michael Collins, and in another gathering in Saarbrücken to meet 12 of the Danke-Buch-Ladies and record some of their memories of that time.

Following the broadcast, the “Kinder Letters” documentary was entered in the “New York Festivals International Radio Program

Awards”, and in June 2016, competing against a total of 296 entries from 29 countries, won the Grand Award in the History section and was also awarded one of three overall Merit Awards.

For our family, the history of the Danke-Buch is a tribute to Mary, who as a young girl recognised its possible importance and kept it safe until her untimely death.

I wish to thank all those who helped and contributed to my research, specifically the Ambassador and Staff of the German Embassy here in Dublin, Frau Birgit Kollet of the Landeshauptstadt Saarbrücken and Athena Media for producing the “The Kinder Letters” documentary.

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