

The Holocaust and Wales: General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company at Treforest Trading Estate

Teachers' Notes

Treforest Trading Estate, near Pontypridd, was set up as part of the Special Areas Act of 1934. The act was created to help parts of Britain with high unemployment, and it offered support to businesses to set up in these areas. When the Nazis began seizing Jewish businesses in Germany in the years after 1933, many Jewish refugees fled here to establish their businesses with help from this scheme.

By May 1940, 55 businesses started by Jewish refugees were operating out of Treforest. They provided jobs for around 1,800 local people.

In this lesson, students will learn about the experiences of the Schoenmann family, who ran a cigarette paper and box factory at Treforest. Their business was deemed “vital to the war effort” as cigarettes were classed as “essential to keeping up morale both in the forces, and at home”.¹

Curriculum links

Key Stage 3

Art and design, History, Literacy skills

¹ George Schoenmann, *Memoirs... The Long Road to Retirement* (Self-published, March 2011), p. 18.

Lesson Plan

LEARNING AIMS

- To understand the lives of refugees who lived and worked at Treforest Trading Estate.
- To encourage empathy with young refugees forced to flee their homes.
- To be able to respond creatively to historical events and themes.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Copies of student worksheet.
- Transcripts of the audio extracts.²
- Materials: suitcase template, scissors, glue/sticky tape, drawing/painting materials.

STARTER

Have the [image of the Treforest Trading Estate](#) projected as the class enter the room

Re-cap learning from [Aero Zipp Fasteners at Treforest Trading Estate](#):

- **Why** did the Jewish refugees set up their businesses at Treforest?
- **What** contribution did they make to Welsh and British life?

DEVELOPMENT

Ask the students to read the information about General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company and the Schoenmann family (student worksheet) and then listen to two oral history clips of George [Schoenmann describing his time at school](#) and [his father's factory at Treforest](#). **[TASK 1]**.

Working in pairs, students should answer the questions on the worksheet:

- Why did the other children at George's school bully him?
- How would you feel if someone bullied you for your nationality/religion?
- How might the school have made George feel more included?
- Children who came to the UK were generally only permitted to take one suitcase with them. Especially precious items were often kept in a small box inside the suitcase. If you were forced to flee from your home, what belongings would you want to take with you? Could they fit inside a suitcase? What items would you put in your small box?

MAIN (Practical task)

Students create their own box following the instructions on the worksheet **[TASK 2]**.

PLENARY

² We added the audio clips' transcripts, which you may choose to share with your students if you think it would be helpful. The transcript is in English and Welsh whilst the clip is in English only.

Ask the students to reflect on the exercises they have completed and discuss what they put in their suitcase/box and why.

Transcripts

[George Schoenmann talks about being bullied at school](#)

I went to the state school and that didn't work out very well 'cos I was—I couldn't speak English. And I was teased mercilessly. You know, they would call me names: 'Jerry' was the favourite one, 'cos of course the war had just started. And they would run around pretending to be aeroplanes, as little children did in those days, with arms outstretched [laughs], making noises and I was always the, the Messerschmitt which got shot at. Anyway, it was, it wasn't very pleasant and the fact that I couldn't speak a word of English of course and no effort was really made to include me in the lessons. So, every day at breaktime, at ten o'clock, I sneaked out through the gate and ran home [laughs]. And this, this went on for three or four months apparently until—well, nobody missed me for a start, but I was caught by, by my father's sister, my aunt, who came to visit my mother unexpectedly and found me sitting on the railway bank and watching the trains! And of course, she told my mother and that was the first intimation that my mother had that something had gone wrong at school.

[George Schoenmann talks about the General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company](#)

The units in—that were built by the government on the Treforest Estate, they all seemed to be of one design. They were very plain, nothing fancy at all. Just a utilitarian building. I, I think it was about seven or 8,000 square foot and the building was—it had offices at the front and it was divided roughly into half and the slightly bigger half, probably 55 percent was devoted to cigarette paper and the other 45 percent was the box making division. They made boxes—well, I don't know, you could put shoes in them—all that sort of thing. Although, of course, they didn't do so well in the war because on the one hand there was very little new stuff being produced, and the one thing that you didn't need was luxury boxes [laughs]. So, they did struggle a bit and the main revenue stream was from the cigarette paper.