

Laying of Stolpersteine for the Wagner/ Prager family, Wednesday, September 21
Presentation by students on the spot – Papendiek 26

1 Introduction

Today we are laying eleven Stolpersteine in front of the house Papendiek 26 so as to commemorate the Wagner and Prager families. Between 1920 and 1939 they lived and worked in the house which had to make way for this building at the end of the 1950s. Ten of eleven family members managed to escape to England and Palestine. The life of this family is exemplary for the exclusion and persecution of Jewish people during the National Socialist dictatorship. Today and here the concrete fates of the Wagner and Prager families are told. They show us how quickly the mood in Göttingen turned against Jewish fellow citizens, how ready Göttingen citizens were to use violence, how many benefitted from the exclusion of the Wagner family, and how few were willing to help. (In the brochure prepared by us you can find illustrations, a family tree and some key points about the Wagner family and the Prager family).

2 Beginnings in Göttingen / The Wagner family business

Markus Wagner and his wife Netty (Neché) came from Poland and opened their first junk goods store as early as 1906 in Groner Straße 4. The business expanded and in 1911 they moved to Johannisstraße 11. While Markus served in the military in World War I from 1915 to 1918, Netty successfully continued the business in Johannisstraße. In 1919, the Wagner family purchased the property in front of which we are now. Netty Wagner traded in used textiles and furniture in a store facing the street, Markus built up the "raw products shop Markus Wagner" in the backyard. Up to 20 collection dealers supplied Wagner with salvage. Markus increasingly transferred responsibility to his three sons working in the business – Hermann, Walter and Sally – since he was not in the best of health. He handed over the management mainly to his son Hermann even before Hitler came to power.

3 Defamation, exclusion, violence

The National Socialists gathered many supporters around them in Göttingen particularly early on. Already in the Reichstag elections on 5 March 1933 they achieved the absolute majority in Göttingen (in contrast to the overall result in the German Reich). The beginning of the methodical exclusion, defamation and persecution of the Jews in Göttingen followed straight away. On 28 March 1933, a march of the Sturmabteilung (SA) took place through Göttingen. In 30 shops – not only those run by Jews – 56 shop windows were destroyed, the synagogue [was] stormed, and anti-Semitic slogans [were] smeared everywhere on pavements and walls. The Wagner and Prager families were also affected. As Polish Jews, the Wagners were at the bottom of the National Socialists' racist scale of values. In particular, the young men of the second generation had to experience this painfully:

- Already in the early summer of 1933, **Sally** (24 years old) was brutally battered by National Socialists on his way home: They knocked Sally unconscious, broke his nasal bone, split his lip, knocked out a tooth and injured his eye. Sally was a member of the

Reichsbanner Schwarz Rot Gold – an association founded in 1924 for the protection of the democracy of the Weimar Republic against its radical enemies. Sally soon went to Denmark to retrain in a course in becoming a farmer – he prepared for his emigration to Palestine which he started in August 1936.

- **Hermann** was attacked and battered several times in Göttingen. Customers turned him away. That is why many business relationships ended. He mentally suffered so severely from this that he was treated as an outpatient on the Geiststraße in 1934. Markus and Netty took their son out of the line of fire, and he sought to emigrate to Palestine, too. Therefore, from 1935 to 1936, he attended a Hachsharah retraining course in Steinach and Blankenese which prepared him to farm and settle in Palestine. However, he was not quite able to establish himself in Palestine and left it again also for health reasons. Being uprooted, he went to France and returned to Göttingen in 1938 for a short time. Finally he arrived in England where he was to remain until the war and beyond.
- **Walter** was battered unconscious by National Socialist thugs in 1937 – taking part was the same thug who had already attacked Sally in 1933. Walter was also meant to leave Göttingen and Germany as soon as possible. Via stops in Cologne and Belgium, he arrived in England in May 1939.

4 Poland Action / Escape

Although the laws for the exclusion of the Jews became continuously stricter, the junk goods business could be kept afloat since the German economy was dependent on experienced recycling companies. On the occasion of the planned migration of his sons, Markus Wagner had the following recorded in his affidavit on 3 September 1936: "Although the increasingly strong anti-Semitic pressure did not affect the business so much, we had personally suffered from it so that we decided to emigrate." Many of his junk goods collectors now worked for other – "Aryan" – businesses. Due to the elimination of these traditionally Jewish businesses, these businesses experienced a strong economic revival such as Heinrich Reseck. Despite the deteriorating business figures, the parents thought twice about how to continue. They would only be able to take a fraction of their fortune with them and to sell their property at a great loss. However, returning to their native country Poland – of which they still had citizenship – was just as little inviting in view of the anti-Semitism that prevailed there. On 27 October 1938, these considerations became obsolete: Markus and Netty were taken into custody pending deportation. In the course of the so-called "Polish Action" they were taken to the Polish border and subsequently remained in the refugee camp in Bentschen. It was not until April 1939 that they were able to follow their sons to Palestine. In the so-called "Polish Action", 17,000 Jews of Polish origin were deported from the German Reich at Himmler's instigation.

5 The daughters

Klara and her brother Karl were in Kassel during the night of the November pogrom and tried, on their part, to obtain exit documents. One day after the pogrom, Klara Wagner returned to Göttingen where she found her parents' house and business ravaged. For fear of arrest, she first hid with friends. Subsequently, she liquidated her parents' business and took

care of selling the remaining household goods and the few pieces of furniture that had remained intact.

In March 1939, the junk goods business Wagner was officially deregistered with retroactive effect from 31 December 1938, the effective date for the prohibition of activity applied to Jewish business people. In June 1939, the Göttingen passport office issued an "alien passport" that entitled her to emigrate. Thanks to a so-called *domestic servants visa* she was able to emigrate to England in July. The 17-year-old Klara was saved but had now to work as a domestic servant in England (sometimes under very unpleasant conditions) like about 20,000 other fled Jewish women – an "untold story" in England.¹ It was not until later that Klara was able to emigrate to Israel.

Markus and Netty had also managed to emigrate to Palestine. However, Markus died in Israel already in 1946. Being completely uprooted – not having command of the language of the country – he and his wife were unable to build up a new existence. Shortly afterwards, Netty went to England where she moved in with her daughter Esther and her husband Hermann.

6 Prager family

Esther, who later called herself Elsie, was the eldest daughter of Markus and Nette. In 1929, she married Hermann Prager who came from Poland as well. They were the grandparents of Michael Prager who is present here today and to whom we once again extend a special welcome. Hermann had come to Göttingen in 1919. He had tried to set up various businesses but had little luck in doing so. He married and moved into the Wagner family home and successfully specialized with a wine agency at the beginning of the 1930s. The Gestapo revoked his license in June 1938. Together with his wife and son Norbert born in 1932 he emigrated to England at the end of July 1939.

7 Moses

Moses Wagner, the eldest son of Markus and Nette, has not yet been mentioned. Moses was born in 1906 – still in Hanover shortly before the move to Göttingen. Since he was four years old he had no longer lived with his parents but, due to a mental handicap, in the Rosdorfer Weg in the local sanatorium and nursing home there. We know no details of the nature of his impairment nor how things went for him or how the relationship to his family was arranged. Moses' situation probably got considerably worse by the Nazi takeover and their despise of people with handicaps at the latest. Moses escaped the Polish Action in 1938 because of his handicap. Within the scope of the Nazis' "euthanasia program", Moses was initially "transferred" to Wunstorf in September 1940. Soon afterwards, he was deported to a killing center in Brandenburg by a bus belonging to the Gemeinnützige Krankentransport GmbH² (GEKRAT) that was responsible for the so-called T4 action under this code name, and

¹ Craig-Norton, Jennifer: The untold stories of the Jewish women who became domestic servants in Britain to escape the Nazis, in: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/untold-stories-jewish-women-domesticservants-britain-escape-nazis/>, July 2019 (looked at last on 6 September 2022).

² Non-profit Ambulance Service GmbH

was killed in a gas chamber. It is unlikely that Moses' parents were informed of his whereabouts as they had already fled.