

# Warm British welcome for Jews fleeing Nazis a 'myth'

27 February 2013

The warm British welcome for Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis in the 1930s is a myth, according to research by a University of Manchester historian.

Bill Williams, from the University's Centre for Jewish Studies, has cast new light on the way [Britons](#) responded to the desperate plight of Jews fleeing Germany after the Nazis came to power.

The [migrants](#) were, he says in his new book published by Manchester University Press, neglected across all sections of British society.

Even the Jewish community themselves, he argues in *Jews and Other [Foreigners](#)*, were inhibited by fears of an anti-Semitic [backlash](#) caused by letting in 'alien' foreigners.

Mr Williams, one of the country's leading scholars of Jewish migration to the UK, believes Government offers of help were half-hearted.

The Quakers declared they would only support "non practicing Jews and Friends" - those with existing contacts within the Quaker community - and the Catholic Church did virtually nothing, argues Mr Williams.

He said: "Though both the British and Mancunians have strong humanitarian traditions, they they were often undermined by self-interest, [government policy](#), the failure to challenge it and anti-semitism.

"So these findings have a critical bearing on the notion of how in Britain we regard ourselves as a tolerant society.

"So much more could have been done to support the Jews – especially as the British knew what was happening in Nazi Germany.

"Many refugees were well treated, but many weren't. There is a degree of complacency about

our recent past so it's important to dispel that myth.

"Lessons should be learned from remembering how it really was: our [political leaders](#) say they preach tolerance, but their rhetoric is often anti-immigrant."

Britain's treatment of the Jews was no worse than many other countries, argues Mr Williams.

Only 1930s Shanghai, which was ruled by Japan, was a true safe haven, where Jews could arrive without a visa.

He added: "Manchester, which touts itself as a beacon of tolerance, was particularly poor.

"The Lancashire Development Company, for example, was happy to bring in refugees but only if they were useful.

"The Kurers, in another example, were a family of devout Viennese Jews brought to Manchester by the Manchester Quakers.

"The Quakers were keen to support the Kurers- but only on their terms and not as Jews.

"The family were documented as taking part in a 'Christmas party' at the Meeting House with the head of the family dressing up as Father Christmas.

"This must surely have been difficult for them.

"Only the Rotary Club acquitted itself well in Manchester, and that was down to two strong individuals who overruled hostility to the Jews within the organisation, opening a hostel for training [refugees](#) in 1938."

Provided by University of Manchester

APA citation: Warm British welcome for Jews fleeing Nazis a 'myth' (2013, February 27) retrieved 14 June 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-british-jews-nazis-myth.html>

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