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Voiceover [00:00:02] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Dr Chris Croly [00:00:08] Well, hello, ladies and gentlemen, and thanks very much for joining us in the latest and very special Café Connect. So, Café Connect is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen. And I'm Chris Croly, I'm the Public Engagement with Research manager at the University. Today is a very special Café Connect, because we're joined by a guest, and that's Barney Crockett, who is the Lord Provost of the City and Royal Borough of Aberdeen. So hello, Barney.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:00:32] Hey there.

Dr Chris Croly [00:00:33] Hi. Great to have you with us. I should say that Barney is here today to talk about his research into the Kindertransport, which brought some 10,000 children of national socialist, occupied and governed countries in Europe in the late 1930s-early 1940s, and some of the children have been retreated to Aberdeen. Looking very, very much forward to hearing your research. And I should also say this Café Connect is, a joint one with the University's Malcolm Hay of Seaton Memorial Committee. So, Malcom Hay of Seaton devoted himself as a mind to highlighting the history of anti-Semitism and the history of the Jewish people. What can we say about Malcolm Vivian Hay of Seaton is a true polymath?

Lord Provost Barney Corckett [00:01:20] Yeah, yes.

Dr Chris Croly [00:01:20] Yeah. He was both a historian and a mathematician, saw active service in the First World War, involved in the Secret Service. And then during the Second World War became a great advocate for Jewish rights, and he also sought a greater understanding of what we know was the Holocaust. He sought to put it in these wider historical and religious dimensions. And has widow Alice Ivy Hay of Seaton made a bequest in a way, to the University of Aberdeen to establish a memorial committee, a memorial lecture series, rather. And this was established for the promotion of a clear understanding and further knowledge of the history and culture of the Jewish people, as well as of religious tolerance more generally. Within the umbrella of the Hay of Seaton Memorial Committee that we bring you this special podcast today. But that, I think, is enough for me, we are here to hear from yourself, Barney. Would you like to start by saying a little bit about the Kindertransport themselves?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:02:13] Yes. And before I do that, I'll just say one word about them here would almost certainly have been involved in some of the things that we're looking at here and I'm sure that will become apparent. But, you

know, the Kindertransport scheme really refers maybe two different things. It's that specific scheme that followed the Kristallnacht events where Britain allowed a large number of Jewish children and some other children to go into the UK without normal immigration procedures and probably the label as applied to people who maybe go for other reasons, too. But the specific Kindertransport scheme did apply to Aberdeen, and that's what I've been looking at. And I think one of the things that surprised me was that Britain was the only country that had a similar scheme. It's quite shocking, I thought. Well, I was quite surprised. For example, in the United States, two congressmen attempted a scheme, but it got no support at all. So, it is quite interesting that Britain did reduce the borders. And again, maybe late in the day, a lot of people didn't get out because it was fairly late in the day. But it is moving that it happened, but maybe shocking it didn't happen on a bigger scale.

Dr Chris Croly [00:03:38] Indeed, that's true. So many things that are in the Holocaust is really what we're dealing with here. And actually, can I ask, how did you come to have a specific interest in this.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:03:49] Well, obviously, I have always been interested in the Holocaust. I'm interested in Jewish history in particular. I mean, I had an interest in one of my predecessors as Lord Provost, Lord Provost Thomas Mitchell, a staggering figure who was the Lord Provost from 1938 to 1947 and he was a fantastic figure. But what I was really struck with was that it said the first thing that he wanted to do when he became Lord Provost in 1938 was to do something for Jewish people in Germany, so that really set me off. And almost immediately after the Kristallnacht, he had a meeting in the Music Hall, which was attended by all the major organisations in the city and just beyond, and who took on major commitments to try to help Jewish children and what was called Jewish and non-Aryan children of Germany and the extended family. And all the threads so far I've got to Vienna and Prague, so, that was the areas that people were coming from. Again, it was Lord Provost Mitchell, and the fantastic human side of Thomas Mitchell. I think what's really moving to me is that Tommy Mitchell was illegitimate and all through his career, he always thought of children who are not being looked after.

Dr Chris Croly [00:05:21] Actually, I'm very much bearing in mind the fantastic Provost portrait of Thomas Mitchell and he looks like such a kindly man and obviously that that comes across in his actions there as well. So actually, there is a very pertinent link back there through the office of the Lord Provost. So do we know how many of these children came to Aberdeen after meetings? I mean, this is what we are concerned with here I guess.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:05:52] No, we don't know the numbers. We know that far fewer managed to come than were planned for. So they had a major commitment from organisations to help fund children coming, it was a big commitment. And, you know, it is very moving that you'll see sometimes the press comments that we're not getting much news from, you know, that the people are finding it difficult. In addition to taking children here, they were also sending things to particularly Prague and Vienna and Budapest to help people, too. They were sending clothes, they were sending whatever they could. But you know, there were hundreds, they were putting up places for two hundred initially and of that only a small number we know about. But we don't know the numbers, again, I've tried to follow a few individuals earlier, but we've got a lot of details about a couple of people and we're looking for what a family out there knows. And that's how I found out about the things, just by people telling you and trying to follow them up. But, not as many came as were planned for and hoped for.

Dr Chris Croly [00:07:15] Yes. I guess there is a couple of points here. Just based on what you are saying, you've mentioned the major institutions who are involved. Them, I'm guessing, was obviously Aberdeen City Council, the incorporated trades, the University,

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:07:28] All of them. Yeah. The meeting at the Music Hall, which is well recorded in the local press, the Lord Provost called the meeting, but you had very much the Church of Scotland, you had you had the cooperative trades, the Burgesses, the Trades Council, the Trade Unions Organisation, all of them making quite big commitments. Lady Aberdeen, who was a huge figure, was a couple of months from her death and her 9th decade, and she undertook to take a large number, you know, she was going to fund and I think from memory, 40. So a huge commitment from the different organisations and tremendously moving to see that.

Dr Chris Croly [00:08:14] Oh, absolutely. So and obviously fewer came than people hoped would get here and as you see this is ongoing research. You know, the story isn't fully told by any means. But as you alluded to, there are one or two that we know a little bit more about in the case. What we've got there is Ernestine Young and Erika Schaefer, these are the two that maybe are best known.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:08:40] Yeah, that's right. And so, we know quite a lot about both of these young people and children. And we're looking for more. But Ernie that you mentioned she came again from Vienna and the first surprise for her is that she was met by the chauffeur of one of the wealthiest people in Aberdeen. So, she was whisked off to Edgehill, maybe the poshest house in Aberdeen at the time. And she made many, many connections to people, including Churchill. So, her

obituary records that she said "Grace for Winston Churchill." And we know that Winston Churchill only spent one day of his life in Aberdeen and it was the Edgehill that he went for his breakfast, where she said grace. But then he planted a tree, which we have on film. And then you've got the freedom of the city people. And again, Thomas Jaffrey and his Lady Jaffrey, they were huge figures in Aberdeen and in particular massive philanthropists. And Thomas got Freedom of the city based on his enormous philanthropic moves,

Dr Chris Croly [00:10:07] I think it's probably germane to do just a brief mention of Malcolm Vivian Hay of Seaton, the Hays of Seaton are one of the great families of Aberdeen as also the Jaffreys are one of the great historic families Aberdeen. They were incumbents, the official Lord Provost for a part of the 17th century. They're very well-known as Quakers in the 17th century, the family to the forefront of the introduction of Quakers. And here we see the lineage coming down to late 19th and early 20th century. And so Thomas, who was actually an actuary at the Aberdeen Savings Bank and this I should know, on top of my head, he was the Rector at the University.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:10:50] I think he was a Rector. Yeah, that's right.

Dr Chris Croly [00:10:54] And just as a footnote to this, one of the Professors of Economics at the University, Keith Bender and I are actually currently undertaking some research in the life of Sir Thomas Jaffrey. He greatly feels that Sir Thomas is one of Aberdeen's forgotten heroes, absolutely, brilliantly. So, I hope to bring a Café Connect on the life of Thomas Jaffrey later on to get to how these things acquired their own momentum. And the story was actually a fantastic, this young girl arrived in Aberdeen that never expected to see a chauffeur driven car, let alone Winston Churchill in a few years' time, that's fate, isn't it? Effectively?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:11:35] It is indeed. Again, the other girl we know quite a bit about, again, some similarities there. She came she came to Aberdeen from Vienna, but her father had been the chemist and a major works on the border of Czechoslovakia and Austria. And he managed just in the nick of time to get out of that town before Jews were rounded up. And it's very, very moving that the parents tried to keep a secret from Erica that she was Jewish. She didn't know she was Jewish until after World War II. They tried to protect her and not tell her, they didn't present as Jewish. They had converted to Christianity and they tried to keep it a secret that the family were Jewish and so Erica left Vienna not knowing that. She arrived and she was slightly different in that she was taken into a boarding school to the Convent of the Sacred Heart that was still operating as a boarding school in my youth. And really, she has written her memoirs, her life story and a third of her life story is based in Aberdeen, although she was there a short part of a very long life.

And she said that Aberdeen was the granite cocoon that protected her World War II. And that is, obviously, very, very moving. I found Erica Schaefer while looking at the Internet, trying to get things. And eventually I found out about it and I didn't, it seemed from the Internet that I was reading that she had died just quite recently. But she hadn't. But fortunately, blessedly, she hasn't and she's still alive. So we are hoping to make some direct contact with her. But she was connect. She was a boarder at the Sacred Heart and in the holiday time she was taken home by other people linked to the school and she met a number of aristocrats and people who worked for Victoria, Queen Victoria. All sorts of very interesting things about that, too.

Dr Chris Croly [00:14:17] So that Sacred Heart that you mentioned, where is it based in Aberdeen?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:14:21] it's known as Aberdeen City Council school of Saint Joseph's in Queens Road area. At that time, it was a boarding school, then it became a primary school, a primary school in which the Bishop, until not that many years ago lived. We have grounds for believing, although it may seem unbelievable, we have grounds for believing that there may be one or two nuns still alive who remember Erika. So we were following that, too astonishingly, so it's amazing how these threads, these human history threads can multiply. You find out more.

Dr Chris Croly [00:14:58] Indeed, that's one of the points. In the start of these Café series and obviously it's a podcast, but we still encourage question and answer and we encourage people to get in touch with us. So if anyone does have any information, I would like to get in touch, we are very easy to find in Aberdeen City Council's website, or you can get in touch with ourselves at the university, it's peru@abdn.ac.uk. If you have any information or you have any further questions for Barney, but you know, we can repeat that at the end of the podcast as well.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:15:30] Indeed. One specific one that I'm trying to thank is that a woman came up to me at an event some years ago and said that a well-known Jewish figure in Aberdeen came up to her door of her house when she was a small child and had a child with them. And he said, can you take a child in the organisation as the child had fallen through. And this was a Jewish child from the Kindertransport and the family took him in and he grew up there and she said he became a millionaire and in London, dealing in cars and wrote his autobiography. But we have managed to trace that, like anybody can know the person who came at the door was a very famous character in Aberdeen. He ran the Palais de Danse and the new cinema of the Curzone Cinema and very much a larger than life entrepreneur. And he did raise a lot of the money in Aberdeen, too. He worked with Lord Provost Mitchell to raise the money. That was Ernest Bromberg and Ernest

Bromberg used to make his old newsreels about Aberdeen at this time. So you can still see them online, but without a commentary, but he was a larger than life media figure. And as I say, that did a lot, he was a central figure in the scheme as well.

Dr Chris Croly [00:16:59] You touched on the nature of research and of course, the nature of historical research has, as you see nebulously, has newspapers, has archives very much oral history in this case that you're you're alluding to there. I was wondering whether there has been any contact with the Hebrew Congregation at Aberdeen any memories come through them or,,?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:17:16] Well, I mean, there's an answer to that in two parts. I mean, the first in terms of contact. Yes, very much so, we're in very close connection to the Hebrew congregation. But there isn't all that much memory through that because the Jewish the Hebrew congregation has tended to circulate in this area over a number of years. So, the historic threads are less than you might expect because we've always had a very small Hebrew community and the history is there. But the families have tended to move on. But yeah, the link is there and the excitement. I mean, it is fair to say that there's a lot of excitement over what we are discovering and we can certainly use some of the written archives of the Hebrew community to help with us.

Dr Chris Croly [00:18:11] OK. So to actually come back to both Erica and Ernie Young. Obviously, in the case of Erika, we knew that she was in the Sacred Heart Convent. But do we know what school Ernestine went to?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:18:28] Well, I'm trying to work on that now. I think of I might manage to get to contact a relation. I'm trying to work on that now. I have a slight suspicion that she may have also gone to the Convent. and that suspicion is based on no more than the fact that she worked for the Sacred Heart as a teacher in London in a later part of our life. So possibly she's also linked to the Sacred Heart. But we don't know that, but I am trying to find out right now.

Dr Chris Croly[00:19:01] So, the house that she stayed in with the Jaffrey's is Edgehill, that's the west end of Aberdeen, the Edgehill Terrace?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:19:08], I think it's a 16 acre site, it is a sizeable state of the art. So I think maybe that the house is even gone. I can't think yeah, there may be something to direct me and fill me with that.

Dr Chris Croly [00:19:30] And I'm probably completely wrong here. Is this the site across the road from the Maryland School, It's that fairly new housing.

Lord Provost Barey Crockett [00:19:38] It's more in certain Cults.

Dr Chris Croly [00:19:38] Oh, all right. I was thinking of Edgehill Terrace here, apologies to Red Herring and Edgehill.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:19:49] It's interesting that there might be a link with the two, the two names, but Edgehill was in the Cults area..

Dr Chris Croly [00:19:58] OK, so it's feasible she went to school there as well.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:20:01] it could be. But we also know that Robert Gordon's college provided two places for boys. So we know that there were at least two boys here who were attending school at Robert Gordon's college. They were given three places in Robert Gordon's college at that time it was Robert Gordon's colleges. And so they had the school, Robert Gordon's college. But they also had technical aspects which are now RGU and they provided free engineering place there as well. In Aberdeen University, just again, this is Kindertransport refugees, more broadly, there were eight refugees interned, as one of the profound ironies was that Jewish from Germany and refugees were interned as Germans. So there were eight students from Aberdeen University who were all refugees who were in town. And Aberdeen University discovered that they managed to have the examination given in the internment camp, which I'm assuming they don't name it for obvious security reasons, but I believe it was the Isle of Man. So I think the university managed to get the nomination That one comment that has been made from the Hebrew congregation is that if you suspect a very broad effort to help refugees was fairly unusual not it's not always the case that there was that. So we had, as you mentioned, Thomas Jaffrey, the parliament, the buildings known in Aberdeen University here. It was an absolute stalwart and support in the refugee cause as well.

Dr Chris Croly [00:21:54] Indeed. And, you know, and we must come back full circle here about Vivian Hay, And he, you know, just looking at his house and what is now Seaton Park. And there he was such an advocate for Jewish rates. He firmly believed that you needed to do something about the persecution of Jews and under Nazi Europe, which he was called over and above pogroms, it was a different territory, learnt Hebrew, became correspondence with Jean Wiseman. Albert Schweitzer. Yeah, you're right. I think people dealing with Aberdeen here as something that it's not unique, but it's certainly probably something.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:22:29] And something I just discovered recently is that Erica Schaeffer, her uncle, came to Aberdeen, who was one of the world's leading scientists, and he was given an honorary degree at the Aberdeen University

in the time that he was here. He was smuggled out of Norway, he was one of the top geophysicist geoscientists in the world and he was on the pier awaiting deportation to Auschwitz when he was secreted off the pier and he was smuggled into Sweden. Unfortunately, he was the only one, but he came to Aberdeen, he met with Erika. And as I said, he got an honorary degree and also at the time he was in Aberdeen, he got a what was called a Foreign Member of the Royal Society, so is Victor Goldschmidt.

Dr Chris Croly [00:23:36] OK, I mean, one of the questions I was going ask was, do we know of any specific links to the university? But we've teased quite a few. The Jewish students at the University, they won the honorary degree. And I think the university did fund some places as well for refugees?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:23:54] I think that was the case for engineering. But could be between what we know as RGU and Aberdeen University.

Dr Chris Croly [00:24:04] So obviously you mentioned Auschwitz and the fate of so many, countless people during the Second World War. And I guess we come to the fates of the families and the parents of Eric and Ernie. Do we know anything about them?

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:24:21] We know the both sides of the coin, if you like, that Ernestine, her father died just before the War and her mother survived and we don't know the details, but her mother was a dentist. So I think it's quite conceivable that she got more chance of surviving, if you had medical expertise, perhaps. But we could maybe do some more research there. Tragically, Erica's parents, I mentioned about the fact that they had tried to keep as they were still writing to Erica, they were writing, interestingly, after the UK government was trying to prevent anybody writing because they were scared of information being passed by on foot. But it's very sad to read the letters. Eventually, they say that the uncle went to Oslo, as I knew at that time, a neutral country. But of course, when Germany invaded Oslo, then that stopped and the uncle had to try and leave. So then the letters stop. Now, Erica did not know what had happened to her parents until fairly recently. She has done a lot of research, a lot of attempts, obviously, the assumption is it's likely they were killed, but she didn't know until about 10 years ago and her children got the evidence that they were murdered in Chelmno and again, we speak the banality of evil. They were taken, all Jews from the Vienna were directed at one point to Łódź, a ghetto in Poland. And then you they were known as being Christian, they had converted from Judaism to Christianity. They may have thought that, might it prevent that. But they were killed first. Non-Jewish Jews, if you like to call them, the people who are not following the Jewish religion were murdered instantly. And as I say, the banality. It was Chelmno where they were just

beginning to experiment in mass killings. So they were killed and the exhaust fumes of masses as the first experiment of mass murder. They're amongst the first victims of mass murder.

Dr Chris Croly [00:27:06] Yeah. It is probably fair to say that Chelmno wasn't a concentration camp, it was it was purely a death camp. And anybody who went had very little survival of any description, it was no work camp. And as you see it was before gas chambers I think it was when they were using sealed trucks that people were put into with the exhaust fed back into. So yeah, I mean absolutely terrible fate and it was the fate of so many people at that time. But again, the whole thing here reflects that this it's ongoing research and it's life. And I think there's almost an irony here, you know, Aberdeen's history well, Barney. And you know that Aberdeen has got the UNESCO recognised Borough records, it's got fantastic documentation from the Mediaeval period and Early Modern period. And yet when you start coming down to the 20th century, it's almost an irony that the official records sort of run out and you start piecing together from so many other different sources. You know, the stories are less well known almost.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:28:16] Exactly, I mean, we'll never know as much about that right now as we know about the sixteenth century to be known and fastidious detail, nothing else. And even that does slightly affect us here. So we are trying we're trying to fill in details, so if anybody can help, we're anxious to do that. Can I just say one thing I maybe should have said earlier? Because you asked about the Hebrew congregation, and the one thing is that they were central in all of this as well. Of the speakers at the Music Hall event, they're all named except for the two contributors from the official representatives of the Hebrew congregation. And again, it's obviously there was a reason why they're not mentioned is that it could have affected relations elsewhere so that they were very much involved in the whole thing as well.

Dr Chris Croly [00:29:14] Of course, that's a very fair point. So, yeah, I think that that sort of brings us towards half an hour. But I think as we go on, it would be great to get this information out to the schools. I mean, the Second World War affected Aberdeen in so many different ways and this is a very human way in which we end the plead with the city and its life. So thank you very much. I am fascinated and there are so many different bits to touch on it further. But obviously we can touch on the life of told Mr. Thomas Jaffrey a little bit more in a subsequent podcast. But if anyone has any questions or any information, so please feel free, either get in touch with Barney directly or through ourselves peru@abdn.ac.uk. But in the meantime, it just it comes to me to say, thank you very much for sharing this with us, Barney.

Lord Provost Barney Crockett [00:30:08] Thank you very much indeed.

Dr Chris Croly [00:30:10] Thanks very much. Goodbye.

Voiceover [00:30:16] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.