

# Knutsford u3a

## FAMILY & SOCIAL HISTORY GROUP

### Meeting Report 16<sup>th</sup> December 2025

Our last meeting of 2025 featured two excellent talks by Frank K and Tom W. Both of them had world wars as their context.

**'Kindertransport'** by Frank K. Following the violence of Kristallnacht in November 1938, Britain allowed unaccompanied children under 17 to enter the UK, if they had a £50 deposit (about £2,000 today) for eventual repatriation. Kindertransport was an organised rescue effort that brought nearly 10,000, mostly Jewish children, from Nazi-occupied territories. Frank's wife's kinswoman, Gertruida Wijismuller-Meijer was quietly responsible for many of the rescues from the Netherlands, right up to the time of the May 1940 Nazi invasion of Holland. Gertruida was Protestant, did not have any children of her own, but risked her own life and used her Christian status and wealth to fund the movement of children to the ports, and a fragile freedom. From Hook to Harwich, SS De Praag carried 500 to safety, an event made all the more extraordinary as they were from Orthodox families, who released the children on the Sabbath. Gertruida must have been persuasive. SS Bodegraven managed to extract 70 orphans, but 190 were left behind as the port was overrun by invaders. The ship put into Falmouth, then on the Liverpool. In Britain, the children were taken in; Wigan deserves a mention, where the refugees were welcomed. Frank will follow up with another story about his wife's family's involvement. Here is the face of one of the



most heroic people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

**'Herbert and Harry Blackwell'** by Tom W. This was a follow up from an earlier presentation. Tom and Fiona visited the battlefields, the cemeteries, the memorials during summer 2025. These two WWII soldiers, one with the British Royal Fusiliers 22<sup>nd</sup> battalion, the other with his Canadian regiment, were first cousins. Herbert fought at Grandcourt, Harry at Vimy Ridge. One has a marked grave, the other an engraved name at the Vimy Ridge memorial and museum (below), which is staffed by Canadians. Vimy Ridge has great significance to Canada. Harry was one of 11,000 Canadians who died in the battle 12<sup>th</sup> April 1917. Herbert and Harry died 25 miles and six months apart. R.I.P.

