

## ASPECTS OF HISTORY

### Child Refugees of WWII



If you walk through St Stephen's Green, a beautiful park in the middle of Dublin, you will come across a bronze statue bearing the following inscription: "With gratitude for the help given to German children by the Irish people after World War II. Roman Herzog, President of the Federal Republic of Germany 23.03.1997". You might stop and wonder what the story behind this statue entails and you would soon find out that it's all about a certain Operation Shamrock, a little-known piece of Irish-German history.

In October 1945, only 5 months after the end of the war, a Dublin paediatrician Dr Kathleen Murphy read about the plight of people in bombed-out cities in Germany. As winter was approaching, she was especially concerned about orphaned children who might be homeless or starving, and managed to establish the Save the German Children Society in Dublin. In all, nearly 500 children, mostly from the Rhine-Ruhr area, arrived in Ireland and stayed around three years, some 50 of them even choosing to remain in Ireland and later marrying Irish partners.

In July 1946, the first children arrived in Dun Laoghaire via passenger ferry. They were offered cocoa, buttered bread and an orange each. One little boy was so fascinated by the orange he bit into it, not realising he had to peel it, as he had never seen an orange before. For most children, it was a life-saving experience – they had lived through war and were sickly, some quite traumatised. Others had less enjoyable experiences, especially those sent to rural areas where they had to work hard, but one man later said that, coming from Cologne, he had never lived in the countryside before and being in the bog with fresh air and good milk was paradise.

One lady, whose mother had died in the bombing of Aachen in 1943 and whose father was still in Russia, was adopted by her Irish family and still lives in Dublin, in a house called "Aachen". She has 5 children and 7 grandchildren. Recently, at a reunion of the former children of Operation Shamrock, she said:

"I came to this island with just the clothes on my back and now I have so much".  
She is happy with her destiny.

The statue in St Stephen's Green, made by Josef Wackerle, is named 'The Three Fates' and depicts the Norse figures of *Urd* (the past), *Verdandi* (the present) and *Skuld* (the future). To quote the plaque attached, they are "spinning and measuring the thread of man's destiny." © **Sheila Gutknecht**