

## WALES AND NAZI GERMANY: THE EXPERIENCES OF KATE BOSSE-GRIFFITHS AND HER FAMILY DURING THE NAZI PERIOD

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### *Abstract*

This is a family memoir recounting the struggles of the author's mother, Kate Bosse-Griffiths, to escape from Nazi Germany and start a new life in Wales. Beginning with an account of the anti-Semitism of the sixteenth-century theologian, Martin Luther, various attempts at survival under Nazi rule are explored in this article, including, on the one hand, enthusiasm towards the regime and on the other hand, opposition. Kate Bosse-Griffiths lost her position at a Berlin university and had little option but to flee. While her family endured the hardship of oppression and war in Germany, Bosse-Griffiths married a young Welsh teacher, J. Gwyn Griffiths, and started a new life in Wales, learning the language and establishing a Welsh literary circle, Cylch Cadwgan, whose young, rebellious members later became eminent authors.

The Jewish experience of persecution during the Nazi period is well documented, and many personal heartrending and harrowing accounts have been published. Nevertheless, for the majority of the six million who died, little remains of their personal story, as whole families were annihilated, and as many survivors found it difficult to come to terms with their experience. In the case of my mother and her siblings, the basic facts of life and death were conveyed to the next generation, but there had been little open discussion. This was not because of lack of knowledge. My mother, Kate Bosse-Griffiths, was always strangely reluctant to discuss the events of the period, and it was only after her death that my brother and I realized that she had spent the last five years or so of her life carefully gathering and copying scores of family letters, documents, and diaries. Her brother, Günther Bosse, had likewise kept in his Swedish home family papers and documents relating to the pre-war and war period. He summoned me to visit him in Karlshamn, Sweden, a year or so before his death in 1999, to relate as much as he could of our family's life after Hitler's rise to power. In doing so, he put on my shoulders the responsibility of recording the family's story: a story of suffering but also of survival through one of the most destructive periods in humankind's history.<sup>1</sup>

1 This article is based on my book, *Yr Erlid* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2012), which was awarded the Welsh Book of the Year in 2013, and its English version, *A Haven from Hitler* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2014). Further notes are found in these publications. In this article I have made use of further information that has come to light since these were published.

It soon became clear that we had a rich source of evidence relating to the various family members in Germany, who adopted contrasting strategies of survival, with varying degrees of success, in the face of evil. ‘Zerbrich die Macht des Bösen und führe uns glücklich durch alle Wirrnisse der Zeit’ (‘Break the power of evil and lead us happily through all of the confusions of this time’) are the words of my grandfather’s prayer in May 1944,<sup>2</sup> two months before he was arrested.

There are many ambiguities in the German side of the story. My grandmother, Käte Bosse, had been born to parents of Jewish descent who had already converted to Christianity and were members of the Lutheran Church in Wittenberg. They had Germanized their surname, from Levin to Ledien. My German grandfather, Paul Bosse, was a patriotic German; he had served and been wounded in the First World War, at the end of August 1914, in the battle near St. Quentin in the Somme region.<sup>3</sup> Their family was torn between hatred of the Nazi regime and a sense of duty to Germany. My grandmother’s sister, Eva, on the other hand, was married to a high-ranking police officer who served in the Reich’s army and who became an enthusiastic general, serving with Rommel in the African exploits. A third strand is represented by a cousin of my grandmother, Hans Ledien, whose family bravely took part in what opposition was possible at the time. It is clear that there was some conflict between them, as some of them served the Nazi system, others were strongly opposed to it, while many tried to survive in constant fear.

A problem that faces any historian, including the family historian, is how to decide what to select. You are always conscious that you are recreating a story, and reinventing lives, and what you write will be the history, as few of the next generation, and few readers, will be able to avail themselves of the original material. I have therefore tried to record the story with care, and in a spirit of respect to all members of the family.

Anti-Jewish sentiments prevalent across Europe throughout the ages provide the general scenario. Wittenberg, a small university town some forty miles to the south of Berlin where my mother was brought up, played a significant role in this. In 2017, the year of writing this article, Wittenberg is busily celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther’s daring act of posting the 95 anti-papal theses on the door of Wittenberg’s *Schlosskirche*. (Although this may be a probability rather than fact, it is certain that the 95 theses were made public, possibly by being posted on the doors of several churches, or simply circulated.)<sup>4</sup> For us as a family, however, of equal importance are the events held at the beginning of April 2017 by the Paul-Gerhardt-Stift hospital to mark its part in the Nazi-led dismissal of my grandfather as chief surgeon in 1935.

Statues of Luther and Melancthon, a theologian and Luther’s collaborator, now dominate the main market square in Wittenberg. Behind the houses on one

2 In a document from the Archive of the Marienschestern of Wittenberg.

3 Confirmation of battle service of Paul Bosse by the Zentralnachweisamt für Kriegerverluste und Kriegergräber: Büro für Kriegsstammrollen, Berlin-Spandau, 9 September 1933, documented in Helmut Bräutigam, *Heilen und Unheil, Zur Geschichte des Paul-Gerhardt-Stifts zwischen 1918 und 1945* (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien, 2017), pp. 183–4.

4 Helmar Junghans, *Wittenberg als Lutherstadt* (Union Verlag, Berlin, 1982), p. 84.

side of the square is the town church, the *Stadtkirche*, which has a sculpture just below the roof displaying Jews sucking a large sow, the *Judensau*, with a rabbi raising the sow's tail. It is a fourteenth-century symbol of anti-Semitism. This was ardently taken up by Martin Luther, who preached some 2000 sermons at that church and who published in 1543 his antisemitic *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*. Luther scorned the Talmud, the Jewish legal scripts, and said in reference to the sculpture of the large sow that Jews should 'eat and drink the letters that drop' from under the sow's tail. The word 'Judensau' was later used by the Nazis when referring to Jews.

In the same year Luther authored a 60,000-word book, *Von den Juden und ihren*



[Fig. 1] The 'Judensau' sculpture on the Stadtkirche, Wittenbe

*Lügen* ('On the Jews and their Lies').<sup>5</sup> In this book he described the Jews as 'base, prostitute people, and not the people of God'. He said that they were 'full of the devil's excreta [...] they wallow in it like pigs'.

Luther devised a seven-point plan against the Jews, and urged the burning of their synagogues and schools, and the confiscation of their books and writings. He urged the destruction of their prayer books and said that rabbis should be prohibited from preaching. In addition, their houses should be burnt and their possessions and money taken, without mercy, and they should be prohibited from lending money. Jews and Jewesses should earn their living through sweat, using the axe and hoe, spade and spinning wheel. Like generations of anti-Semitic Roman Catholics, Luther justified his arguments by claiming that Jews crucified Christ and had refused to accept him as the Messiah.

Luther had previously hoped to convert Jews to Christianity and argued that they were of the same blood as Christ. He acknowledged that priests and monks had treated Jews as if they were dogs rather than people, but he became bitter after failing to attract them to the Christian faith and pronounced that he would rather baptize Jews by lowering them into the river Elbe, with heavy stones around their necks.

This does not correspond to the commonly-held portrayal of the Luther who is so respected in Wales for translating the Bible, for hymn-writing, and for leading the Protestant Reformation. For so many Welsh people, Luther's major accomplishment was translating the Bible into the German of his day, which led within a half century to the translation of the Bible into Welsh, an event regarded by many as one that allowed Welsh to prosper as one of Europe's modern literary languages.

Four centuries later, however, the Nazis took advantage of Luther's anti-Jewish pronouncements. They could justify their anti-Semitism by quoting the founder of Protestantism. They published a booklet using Luther's exhortations and extended his arguments into the twentieth century: 'Away with them' is the alarming incitement.<sup>6</sup>

Hitler's rise to power and his immediate attention to the Jews had swift effect on my family. It was their Jewish ancestry that put my family in jeopardy, as the Nazis, from the outset, began to restrict posts which Jews could hold, and this affected my grandparents' generation and their children.

Who could have blamed my grandparents for thinking that there was still hope in a country so full of hatred? They refused an offer to flee to South America. After the First World War, Paul Bosse had become the chief surgeon at the Paul-Gerhardt-Stift hospital, Wittenberg, which was run, as are many in Germany, by the church in collaboration with the town council. In the general election in the spring of 1933, the National Socialists won 48.7% of the vote in Wittenberg, around 5%

5 Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1543); repr. in *Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen: Neu bearbeitet und kommentiert von Matthias Morgenstern* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2016).

6 Landesbischof Martin Sasse, *Martin Luther über die Juden: Weg mit ihnen* (Freiburg: Sturmhut-Verlag, 1938).

higher than the national average.<sup>7</sup> By 1933, Wittenberg's town council was already led by prominent members of the Nazi party. Werner Faber, who had risen in the ranks of the SA, became Oberbürgermeister of Wittenberg in September, after the democratically-elected Arnold Wurm had been arrested, and during this period the dismissal of Paul Bosse was already being discussed. In 1935, the town's lord mayor was Dr Emil Otto Rasch. As a prominent member of the SS, he became head of the Gestapo in Frankfurt in 1938 and then of the secret police in Königsberg, today's Kaliningrad. He was involved in the German plot to attack Poland on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1939, and with Reinhard Heydrich he established the Soldau camp. With a double doctorate in law and political economy, he was responsible for the killing of Polish intelligentsia before arranging the massacre in the Babyn Yar ravine, where 33,771 Jews from Kiev were killed on 29 and 30 September 1941. This has been described as the largest mass killing in the history of the holocaust until then. To him, the dismissal of Paul Bosse, in the scheme of things, was a minor concern, but at the time it was an early sign of power.<sup>8</sup> Eventually Dr Otto Rasch died before the case against him in the Nüremberg trials was concluded.

Against this political background an explosion occurred in a WASAG (the *Westfälisch-Anhaltische Sprengstoff-Actien-Gesellschaft Chemische Fabriken*) munitions factory. There are various accounts of the numbers killed and wounded. One source suggests that 120 were killed, while 112 were seriously injured with a further 713 suffering lesser injuries. Paul Bosse spent the following weeks successfully treating the patients, of whom only one died, due to his experimental use of sulfonamide in treating wounds.

Following the disaster, Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler unexpectedly visited the hospital, where Paul Bosse introduced them to the patients, especially those who had been seriously wounded. The visit received wide coverage in the Nazi press, and a detailed report appeared in the party newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*.<sup>9</sup> A newspaper picture of Hitler with my grandfather is one of the pictorial records we have of this period.

Paul Bosse was thrown out of the hospital later that year, and his position taken over by Dr Fritz Korth, a Party member and later SS member.<sup>10</sup> Paul had by then started a clinic-hospital in the family home and had the Hitler picture hanging in a prominent place, possibly to try to give himself a sign of recognition intended for the local Nazis and SS members, whose wives came to his hospital to give birth. But there were increasing restrictions. His wife was not allowed to work in the clinic. His son, Günther, although he had qualified as a doctor in Munich, was not allowed to practise. Another son, Fritz, was not allowed to continue his education.

7 Bräutigam, *Heilen und Unheil*, p. 35. Elements of Wittenberg's willing engagement with the Nazi party are illustrated in Renate Gruber-Lieblich, *...Und morgen war Krieg!* (Halle: Projekte-Verlag Cornelius, 2007).

8 His involvement in the dismissal of Paul Bosse is found in a letter by Martin Stosch, manager of the hospital, 29 June 1935, reproduced in Bräutigam, *Heilen und Unheil*, pp. 202–4.

9 'Then he [Paul Bosse] led the Führer to the seriously injured, who, as all others, were accommodated in light, friendly rooms.' Translated from report documented in Bräutigam, *Heilen und Unheil*, p. 201. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

10 This is related in Detlev and Ute Stummeyer, *Paul Bosse: Seine Klinik in Wittenberg, Unerwünschte Wahrheitsuche* (Eisleben und Halle: Projekte-Verlag Cornelius, 2014), pp. 109–12.



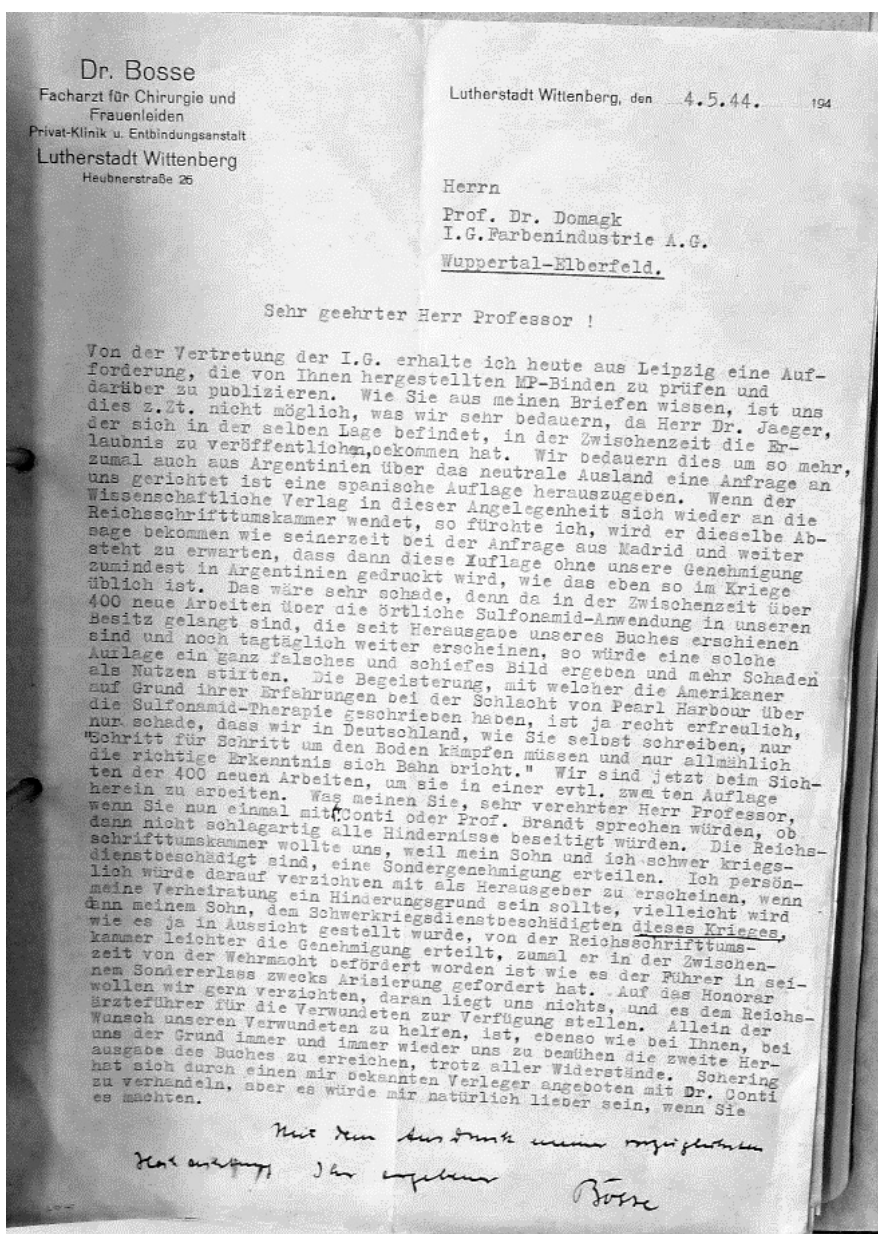
[Fig. 2] *Paul Bosse (standing, left) with a patient and Hitler*

Paul Bosse, having set up his own medical practice with the help of Marienschwester, nuns from the Schönstatt Order, continued with his research work on the use of sulfonamide as an antibacterial agent. He expanded upon this treatment in various articles and then in a book.<sup>11</sup> He was in frequent correspondence with Gerhard Domagk who was awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1939 for his work on the antibiotic Sulfonamidochrysoidine. He had been prohibited, however, from accepting this by the Nazi regime. During this period, when Gerhard Domagk was associated with IG Farbenindustrie, investigating the use of a red dye as an antibiotic, Paul Bosse wrote to him conveying his frustration with the difficulty of publishing under the Nazis, and bemoaned that the huge response to his book could not thus easily lead to a second publication. In his letter of 4 May 1944, Paul Bosse asked Gerhard Domagk if he could contact two of the Nazi elite physicians, Karl Brandt and Leonardo Conti, who were directly involved in the euthanasia programme,<sup>12</sup> in an attempt to facilitate a further publication. Conti committed suicide on 6 October 1945, before his Nuremberg trial began, while Brandt was executed on the 2 June 1948.

11 Paul Bosse, Günther Bosse, Karl Heinz Jäger, *Die örtliche Sulfonamidtherapie* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1943).

12 Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 189–90.





[Fig. 3] A letter from Paul Bosse to Professor Domagk, 4 May 1944  
(Bayer archive, Leverkusen)

In his letter to Domagk, Paul Bosse mentions a dispensation given by Hitler to his son, Günther, who had been seriously injured in the Second World War, that he and his family could be 'aryanized' following the war. Some have wondered why Paul Bosse and his family were not rounded up sooner by local Nazis, who were clearly dedicated in their persecution of Jews. This dispensation could be one reason, although there was some ambiguity regarding the protection given to couples whose marriage was recognized as a *privilegierte Mischehe* – a 'privileged mixed marriage'.

Local Nazis, however, tried to ensnare Paul Bosse by other means. In 1941, local town council workers were prohibited from using the Bosse Klinik and the family was then prohibited from using a car to visit patients. The local medical office, following a statement by Fritz Korth, then brought a case against Paul Bosse, accusing him of infecting mothers with venereal disease.<sup>13</sup> The case was heard by the Reich's medical office in Halle on 5 August 1942. The case notes stated that he was married to a Jewess and that he was neither a member of the Nazi Party nor of the Nazi Association of doctors. The medical court, despite all claims, found that Paul Bosse had treated patients professionally.

Paul Bosse's daughter, Dolly, had already started working as a doctor in Wittenberg, having graduated in Munich. Local Nazis distributed leaflets urging inhabitants to avoid her practice, as well as the businesses of others of Jewish origin. Then an accusation was made against Dolly of wrongly using deep X-Ray equipment. As it happened, she was not in possession of such equipment.

Others in the family tried to live through the difficult times in Germany as part of the system. Eva, my grandmother's sister, was married to an army officer, Willibald, whose career after the First World War had taken him to police work before returning to army duties in 1935, later to become an army general. He was instructed to divorce Eva in order to keep his position, and doing so would ensure that their three children could be accepted as Aryans. On 26 October 1938, their daughter Eva Monika returned home from school to find their mother hanging from a rope. Eva had committed suicide to save her children.

It was only recently that my cousin Ute Stummeyer searched army archives in Germany and found a letter written by Willibald on 26 October 1938, the same day as his wife's suicide, offering his resignation from the army. He must have written this letter a day too late. So it was that Willibald could continue with his army career. Eva's death was, however, to some extent in vain. Their son, Joachim, was killed in the first weeks of the war. Willibald's army service took him to the Balkans and then to the eastern front attack on southern Russia. He led a tank brigade in Africa and on 1 January 1943 became Major General; in May of that year he was presented with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves. With Rommel he was among those who signed the surrender to the Americans and was taken prisoner, firstly in Britain and then in America, where he met his death, probably by committing suicide, although some reports give an account of a car accident. Some of Willibald's surviving letters declare openly his support for Hitler's aims, but, as we now know, this did not blind him from a sense of family honour.

13 Documented in Bräutigam, *Heilen und Unheil*, p. 215.



In 1937, Theodor Habicht was made Oberbürgermeister in Wittenberg. He had been a fervent Nazi supporter since 1927, had been responsible for anti-state terror in Austria, and was one of the prominent Nazis who were responsible for the Kristallnacht pogrom on 9 and 10 November 1938 in Wittenberg. It was not a coincidence that the Wittenberg Stadtkirche had held on 10 November 1938 a celebration of Luther's birthday, with an address by the Generalsuperintendent D. Eger on Luther's relevance for the present day.<sup>14</sup> On that night Nazi gangs attacked and burnt synagogues; broke into the homes of Jews; the home of Hans Ledien, my grandmother's brother, was looted. He was arrested and taken to Buchenwald concentration camp. A month later he was released and ordered to leave Germany, otherwise he would be taken back to Buchenwald without a second chance. The night and following events are described in a letter from Günther to my mother:

After that the gasworks extinguished the gas and the lights, and then came 'the rage'. Working in two groups, the flats of wealthy Jews and businesses and offices were demolished. A bomb attack would not have caused worse havoc [...] Hans was in the concentration camp for five weeks [...] There were 25,000 in the camp from November onwards [...] He was not allowed to say a word about how they were treated. They threatened to shoot him [...] They did not sleep in barracks, but, it seems, on the ground under one blanket, and far too little to drink and NO kind of work at all! A man's life is worth nothing there – he survived everything well, better than expected, but in spirit he has almost been destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

Flight was his only hope, and a place became available for him on a ship sailing to Shanghai, where he spent the remainder of the war years. This saved his life, but his wife and two young daughters were left to fend for themselves in an increasingly hostile town, managing to survive the allied bombing.

There was little joy for those who opposed the system. My grandmother's cousin, Curt Ledien, was a member of a small group in Hamburg that met to discuss ways of opposing the regime. They linked up with a group in Munich – *die Weiße Rose*, 'the White Rose' – and distributed anti-Hitler leaflets.<sup>16</sup> They were caught. Curt Ledien spent some time in hard labour, building bunkers for the Nazis, before being taken to Neuengamme concentration camp and shot. His name still lives, on a street in Hamburg, and also at the *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*, a museum in Berlin which commemorates those who opposed Nazism.

In the case of my mother, Kate Bosse, losing her job was probably the circumstance that led to her eventual survival. No-one of Jewish descent was to

14 Taken from Ronny Kabus, *Juden der Lutherstadt Wittenberg im III. Reich* (Austellung für die Landeszentrale für politische Bildung in Sachsen-Anhalt und das Luther-Zentrum e.V. in Lutherstadt in Wittenberg im Jahr 2003), p. 99.

15 Translated from a letter, 27 December 1938.

16 Inge Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1955, repr. 2003); *Die Weiße Rose und das Erbe des deutschen Widerstandes*, Münchner Gedächtnisvorlesungen (München: C.H. Beck, 1993).

hold any public post following the Nürnberg Laws of 1935. She was working in 1936 at the Egyptological Museum in Berlin and it was her misfortune that a fellow worker betrayed her. Her boss, on learning that she was of Jewish descent, had no choice but to dismiss her. After a difficult period trying to find a country which would take her – and this depended on finding employment – she first went to Scotland, then England, finding a place eventually in Somerville College, Oxford.

This meant several difficult decisions for Kate. One of these was having to part from Niki, her betrothed and the son of a Russian general at the time of the Czars. There had been misgivings in the family regarding her relationship with him, but it was with him that Kate shared her enthusiasm for Egyptology, and also for communism. In England, Kate found herself associating with the left-wing Bloomsbury group, finding new loves, and she confesses to Niki that her ‘path does not any longer lead directly’ to him.

There occurred a profound relationship with an Englishman called Stanley. It was this love affair that forced Kate to think anew on her role as a woman and possibly wife. In her diary she notes how she recoils from becoming a passive and devoted partner:

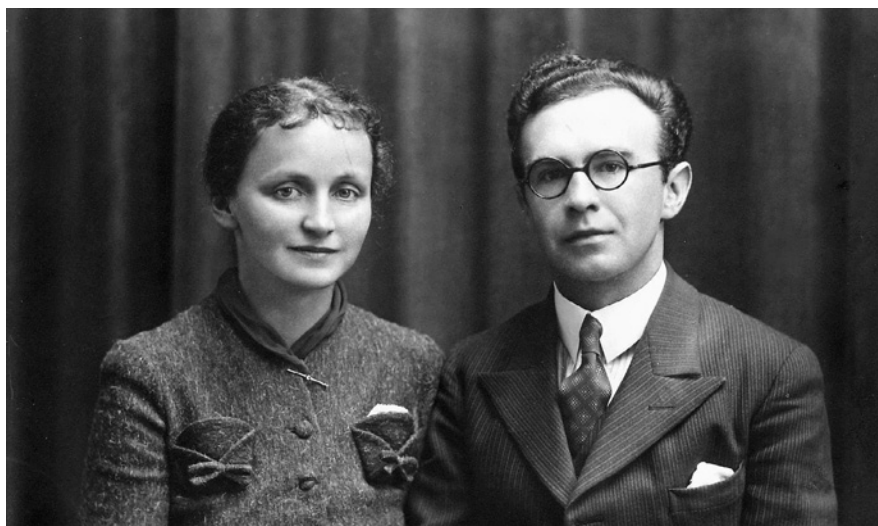
I have fought the bravest of all battles against the greatest of all gods, who forces me in every way to love an Englishman, fie the devil [...] What do you really want? Have you come so far that a peaceful life, a caring ‘husband’, who, when it is possible, cooks for you, and who, so politely, can satisfy you [...] I still have the dream that I want to be a PARTNER to a PRODUCTIVE person, NOT A PASSIVE ONE, that I continue with my life’s work. But I’m afraid of the day when I will tell myself: live in the most comfortable way, everything is so unimportant *sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>17</sup>

There is an agonizing entry in Kate’s diary of 4 April 1938, where she notes that she longs to have roots and to be in Germany, but admits to herself that this is no longer a possibility. She recognises that there is a ‘ballast that has already been thrown out’, and puts as an aim the need to ‘marry a man with whom you can have children’.

It was in Oxford, in the first months of 1939, that Kate met J. Gwyn Griffiths, a Welsh student of Classics and Egyptology. With this common interest, they quickly fell in love. Letters followed which included my mother’s first acquaintance with the use of Welsh as a written language. In the footnotes of one letter, my father explains how ‘fy’ is the first person singular of the possessive pronoun ‘I’ and how ‘anwylaf’ is the superlative form of the adjective ‘dear’. My father had obtained a teaching post at Porth Grammar School, not far from his family’s home at Pentre, in the Rhondda valley, where his father, Robert Griffiths, was a minister at Moriah chapel. They married swiftly, due to the onset of war, running away from the Rhondda to a registrar’s office at Pontypridd.

The Rhondda, one could imagine, was not a destination that would have

17 Translated from Kate’s diary, 31 March 1938.



[Fig. 4] *Kate and Gwyn Griffiths, after their marriage in 1939*

appealed to someone brought up in privileged circumstances in Germany, but, remarkably, it was in the Rhondda that Kate found a Welsh-speaking family and community which embraced her. Wales, and the Rhondda, can take pride in having given such a welcome to a refugee. With the war having closed all doors to Germany, with little or no contact possible, Kate set out to develop a love of Wales and its language, having found a country where literature, song, and language, together with tolerance and co-operation, formed the basis of civilized society. All this was far removed from the perfected system of evil of Nazi Germany.

In a Home Service radio broadcast of 27 October 1942, Kate says that she ‘fell in love with the Welsh mountains’ on her first visit to the Rhondda. She felt that she ‘had started a new life; and really, like a growing child I am now trying to master a new language – the Welsh language’. Her reason for doing so must have been practical on the one hand, but she expounds on this, ‘I learn Welsh not only in order to get to know the riches of the Welsh literature [...] but in order to come nearer to the soul of the Welsh [...]. Every attempt of mine to express myself in Welsh was greeted with a smiling satisfaction which was already a reward of its own.’

In her home, Cadwgan, in St. Stephens Avenue, Pentre, she welcomed J. Gwyn Griffiths’s friends, including Rhydwen Williams and Pennar Davies, and was instrumental in setting up what became known as *Cylch Cadwgan*, the Cadwgan Circle of writers. There was a certain amount of accident in this as there was no original intention to set up a circle of avant-garde authors. It was at the outset more of a circle of friends, which was described by Pennar Davies as an ‘exceptionally close society, even a passionate one’.<sup>18</sup> During the war years the circle gave its

18 ‘Aduniad Cylch Cadwgan’, *Y Gwrandawr*, Mawrth 1971, p. 4.

members, who were Welsh nationalists, Christians, and pacifists ‘an oasis of hope’.<sup>19</sup> The circle’s literary and philosophical aims were to face religious, social, and sexual issues with avid honesty and engagement in contrast to the art-for-art’s sake stance which was prevalent in pre-war Wales. One important contributor to the group was George M. Ll. Davies, the brave and committed pacifist who at that time worked with the Quaker community at Maes-yr-Haf at Trealaw, in the Rhondda Valley.<sup>20</sup> The circle did not depend so much on organized meetings but grew around visits lasting some days by the members to the home of Gwyn and Kate Griffiths.

Although this period of coexistence in the Rhondda lasted for only some three or four years, it had a formative influence on the literary output of its members. Rhydwen Williams became an accomplished poet and novelist,<sup>21</sup> with his poem *Ffynhonnau* (‘Fountains/Springs’), an ode to Rhondda’s Welsh cultural life, winning the crown at Swansea’s National Eisteddfod in 1964. His panoramic and partly biographical trilogy on the Rhondda have become a lasting tribute to the struggles and tribulations of those in Rhondda’s colourful community.<sup>22</sup> Pennar Davies became a nationally acclaimed poet and novelist who infused his poems and stories with profound cross-cultural literary knowledge and religious insight. J. Gwyn Griffiths published his first volume of poetry, *Yr Efengyl Dywyll* (‘The Dark Gospel’) during the last year of the war, and published three further volumes, also with substantial critical acclaim.<sup>23</sup>

Although the group wanted to be anti-establishment, and were ready to challenge accepted norms of morality and religious intolerance, there is clear evidence of their joy when their literary output met with critical acceptance. Kate was the first of these budding authors to win at the National Eisteddfod and to have a winning novel in a national competition. Her novel, *Anesmwyth Hoen* (‘Uneasy Passion’) was judged the best in a competition organized by Llyfrau’r Dryw. It was first published in 1941 and was reprinted four times by April 1942. Aneirin Talfan Davies, in the book’s blurb, commented, ‘We do not exaggerate when we say that here is an author that has jumped in one leap, as it were, to the first rank of Welsh authors.’

The novel, following the German *Bildungsroman* tradition, relates the romantic relationships of a Welsh girl as she ventures into more sophisticated spheres in London and Germany with consequential emotional and societal pressures. Kate’s own life story provided her with a telling background, as members of the Cadwgan group put emphasis on self-revelation. The awakening feelings of a maturing girl

19 Ibid.

20 His life and accomplishments have recently been appraised by Dr Jen Llywelyn, *Pilgrim of Peace: A Life of George M. Ll. Davies* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2016).

21 His poetry has been collected and published as *Rhydwen Williams: Y Casgliad Cyflawn 1941–1991*, (Llandybie: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 1991).

22 In the largely autobiographical *Cwm Hiraeth* trilogy, the novels are *Y Briodas* (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1969), *Y Siôl Wen* (Llandybie: Llyfrau’r Dryw, 1970), and *Dyddiau Dyn* (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1973).

23 *Ffroenau’r Ddraig* (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1961); *Cerddi Cairo* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 1969), *Cerddi’r Holl Eneidiau* (Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1981). His output has been collected and edited by Heini Gruffudd, *Hog dy Fwyell* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2007).

are portrayed against a constant questioning of accepted behaviour. Both strands were to become a feature of Kate's future work. In her diary in the early fifties, with reference to the Welsh novels of the time, she wrote, 'Do I have the right to break into this self-satisfied tradition with my *De omnibus dubitandum?*'<sup>24</sup>

In another diary entry, Kate attempts to understand her urge to question so many of the norms of Welsh patriarchal society. As a refugee it would be understandable that it was the upheaval in her personal life that made her analyze her new surroundings. She suggests otherwise: '[...] it was not Wales that tore me for the first time from the security of my own tradition. Perhaps it was Nietzsche who did this.'<sup>25</sup> It was Nietzsche's emphasis on self-fulfilment that provided the pathos of her short story, *Y Bennod Olaf* ('The Last Chapter'), which was successful in the 1942 National Eisteddfod, with Kate Roberts adjudicating. A realization of pending death and of the shortness of her life gives Mair an urge to taste life to the full while seeing others wasting the opportunity given to them. Central to this is the constant questioning of the order and conventions of society, with its shared beliefs and conventional morality that prevent women from fulfilling their gifts. Kate developed this theme later in her most famous novel, *Mae'r Galon wrth y Llyw* ('The Heart is at the Helm').<sup>26</sup>

The extent to which Kate's work was influenced by her dual nationality and her experiences as a refugee have been discussed by others.<sup>27</sup> In *Mae'r Galon wrth y Llyw*, Kate has expanded the *Bildungsroman* genre to challenge commonly-held beliefs. Although the novel describes aspects of academic and professional society in a post-war Welsh town, the storyline is taken directly from family experiences in pre-war and wartime Germany. The Welsh background allows the author to comment critically and satirically on the strictures of Welsh patriarchal society and especially its superficial religious practice, while her sister's life-story provides a means of inquiring into a deeply ingrained personal and societal morality. During the war years, Kate's sister had three children by her former sweetheart, having also had three children by her husband. This search for love and fulfilment outside society's moral boundaries challenged the very notion of morality and has been seen as an early expression of feminist thought in Welsh.<sup>28</sup>

While Kate had full contact with her family before the war, this ended suddenly.

24 Diary of 1953–54, p. 87.

25 Ibid.

26 *Mae'r Galon wrth y Llyw* (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1957, repr. with a foreword by Heini Gruffudd, Dinas Powys: Honno, 2016).

27 This is a central discussion in Gwennan Higham's M.A. thesis, 'Dy Bobl di fydd Fy Mhobl i', published in R. Görner, ed., *Angermion*, vol. V (December 2012), pp. 161–90. Marion Löffler depicts the relationship between Kate's background and adopted land in a lecture, 'Kate Bosse-Griffiths (1920–1998)', published in Bernhard Maier and Stefan Zimmer, eds., *150 Jahre 'Mabinogion' – Deutsch-walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 167–84. Kate's work has been discussed in Bethan Hicks, *Astudiaeth o Yrfa Lenyddol Kate Bosse-Griffiths* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Wales Swansea 2001).

28 See Katie Gramich, *Twentieth Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007); see also Mair Rees, *Y Llawes Goch a'r Faneg Wen: Y Corff Benywaidd a'i Symbolaeth mewn Ffuglen Gymraeg gan Fenywod* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014).



During the war years it was impossible for her to have direct contact with her family and it is difficult to imagine this aspect of the fate of so many refugees. At rare intervals, as her brother Günther had married a Swedish girl, there was some contact through the Red Cross and Sweden, but sometimes with misunderstood messages, even in matters of life and death. What is clear is that Rhondda and Wales gave Kate not only a safe haven during the Hitler years but also new Welsh-language surroundings which provided her with a rich source of cultural and creative succour. It seems clear that she not only kept her sanity by immersing herself in Welsh life and the Welsh-speaking world but started on a new literary career which would scarcely have been possible in Germany. Thank God we are a literary nation.

It seems possible that the close family would have survived the war without imprisonment were it not for the unsuccessful attempt of Count Stauffenberg, the German officer, and others to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944. This led Nazis in many parts of Germany to round up Jews who had not yet been caught and imprisoned and who held identity cards showing at least half Jewish ancestry. On the day after this failed attempt, Wittenberg Nazis ordered the arrest of Käte Bosse (Kate's mother), together with her husband Paul and two of their children, Dolly and Fritz, along with Dolly's husband Georg. It seems that Paul Bosse's deputy at the hospital, Dr Korth, was one of the instigators. Günther, who remarkably had been allowed to serve with the army for a second time as a medical officer, was arrested without charge in November 1944. It seems that the family was first taken to the police station in Wittenberg and sent from there to a further centre of detention.

The eldest daughter, Dolly, was released after around six weeks in prison, when the Nazi authorities relented following an appeal by her husband, Georg, who, having been released himself after one day, pleaded with the Führer's headquarters in Berlin on the basis of her ill-health and of her responsibility for her five surviving children. Dolly was released on condition that she did not work as a doctor and that she would work as a ground digger at a soap factory in Wittenberg. When the Russians reached Wittenberg in the following year, bringing devastation in their wake, Dolly fled with her children and her possessions in a pram on a fortnight's illegal hike to western Germany. She then settled in Baden-Baden, in the home which Paul Bosse had bought with a view to providing security for his daughter Kate who had fled almost pennilessly to Britain.

The two sons of Paul and Käte Bosse, Fritz and Günther, were placed in Zöschen concentration camp. This was a camp for foreigners, where they were made sanitary officers. They succeeded in reducing the numbers dying there from scores a week to just a few. Fritz documented their experiences there.<sup>29</sup> They spent the rest of the war in the camp and survived typhus, but when the camp was emptied as the Americans arrived, the prisoners were sent on a forced march.

29 Parts of this document are reproduced in H. Gruffudd, *Yr Erlid*, and then by Cor Bart and Susanne Göhrcke, 'Kurzbiografie und Bericht von Fritz Bosse', *Gedächtnisachse, Zwangsarbeit im Dritten Reich (Region Merseburg)* (Heimat- und Geschichtsverein Zöschen e.V. Leuna, 2013), pp. 83–94.



[Fig. 5] *Kate and Gwyn Griffiths  
in 1939*



[Fig. 6] *Käte and Paul Bosse,  
around 1910*

A German officer was ordered to shoot both Günther and Fritz, but did not obey the order, and they survived. After the war Günther settled with his Swedish wife Edith in Karlshamn, on Sweden's south coast, and pursued a successful career as a doctor. Fritz for a while became responsible for an expanding state agricultural concern in Wittenberg, but, with no wish to become part of the communist system, managed to emigrate to West Germany where he founded a successful agricultural machinery plant at Lübecke.

Paul Bosse was imprisoned for some weeks before being taken to serve in a hospital in Osterode, a picturesque town in the Harz mountains. Käte Bosse, then in her early sixties, was taken first to the local police prison. She was then transferred to a prison in Halle, a nearby town. A prison survivor later told Paul Bosse that she was terrified by the thought of being transferred to Auschwitz. That did not happen. She was transferred to another prison in Leipzig, and then, on 1 November, she was transported to Ravensbrück, the concentration camp to the north of Berlin, which was built on Himmler's orders to house mainly women and children. Of the 130,000 or so women who were interred there, only some 30,000 survived.<sup>30</sup>

By 16 December, Käte was dead. It was a cold winter when she was taken to Ravensbrück. At the same time 4,000 women were brought there from eastern Europe. There was no room for them in the camp's barracks, so a large tent was put up to hold them, without water or sanitation. A woman who survived the camp told Paul Bosse not to pain himself with thoughts of how they lived and died in the camp.

Within a year after the end of the war, Paul Bosse was called by the town mayor to return to Wittenberg, but he no longer wished to operate under the auspices of the hospital which had in July 1944 taken possession of his home and clinic and robbed it of all its equipment. In spite of his mental pain following his wife's murder at Ravensbrück, he resolutely renewed the clinic, which after his death operated in the newly formed GDR, and as a member of the town council he took part in establishing a new political order. Exhausted by his experiences, however, he died of heart failure in 1947. The clinic, nevertheless, continued successfully under the leadership of Dr Kurt Jonas, who was its leading doctor from 1947–1975, and under the care of the Schönstätter Marienschwestern. In more recent years the clinic was taken over by the Alexanier Order, who have built a new establishment in Wittenberg, still called the Klinik Bosse.

The family story in Wittenberg might have ended there, were it not for the report published in 1983 by Wolfgang Böhmer, a leading doctor at the Paul-Gerhardt-Stift from 1974 to 1991 who became minister-president of Sachsen-Anhalt from 2002 to 2011. The report exonerated the hospital from blame in the case of Paul

30 Ravensbrück's history as a concentration camp and the experiences of women imprisoned there are found in Claus Füllberg-Stolberg et al., *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern, Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2000), and Jack G. Morrison, *Ravensbrück, Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp 1939–45* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2000).



[Fig. 7] *The Stolperstein outside the family home in Heubnerstraße (Bossestraße today), Wittenberg*



[Fig. 8] *Heubnerstraße renamed as Bossestraße, 16 December 2016*

Bosse's dismissal.<sup>31</sup> Many local people were dismayed by an apparent refusal to accept that the hospital played a vigorous part in the persecution of those of Jewish descent or with Jewish connections.

One local initiative was the placing of a *Stolperstein* in memory of Käte Bosse on the pavement in front of the family house in 2009. Then, on 16 December 2014, a memorial service for Käte Bosse was held at the clinic on the seventieth anniversary of her death. Following several suggestions, Prof Hans-Jürgen Grabbe succeeded in gaining the support of the town council to rename the street where the family lived, from Heubnerstraße to Bossestraße, which led to a ceremony attended by many family members on 16 December 2016.

A 2014 publication by Ute Stummeyer, Dolly's daughter, and her husband Detlev Stummeyer<sup>32</sup> forcefully rejected Böhmer's interpretation, but the Paul-Gerhardt-Stift hospital had already, in 2010, commissioned Helmut Bräutigam, leader of the historical archives of the Johannisstift in Berlin, to research the history of the Paul-Gerhardt-Stift between 1918 and 1945.<sup>33</sup> His conclusions are unequivocal, that there were doctors and nurses in the hospital and board members from the town council who were enthusiastic Nazi supporters, and that the decision to dismiss Paul Bosse stemmed from their commitment to the Nazi regime and its ideology. There were later attempts to reinvent events and circumstances, and the present superintendent and president of the trustees of the hospital, Christian Beuchel, notes 'Unser Rückblick ist mit Scham erfüllt' ('Our retrospective view is filled with shame').<sup>34</sup> A service was held at the hospital on 2 April 2017, and a commemorative plaque was unveiled.

The path to this recognition has been long and winding, and were it not for the wealth of documents and family persistence, it would not have come to a just conclusion. The diktats of the central Nazi regime were enthusiastically carried out at a local level, and so it was that one of Europe's most cultured countries became its most inhumane. The centuries of religious and racial intolerance crystalized in the twentieth century, with devastating effect.

One would have hoped that the world had since learnt from the experience of Nazi Germany. Yet today we still see suffering and killing, with wars causing the largest movement of refugees since the Second World War. UK politics has recently been riddled with racial hatred and insular selfishness. Rather than trying to find a humane way of accommodating refugees, the UK government raises barriers and sells arms to utterly unprincipled regimes. It is, at least, to Wales's credit that during the atrocities of the Second World War it welcomed a refugee who went on to contribute to the country's literary and cultural heritage.

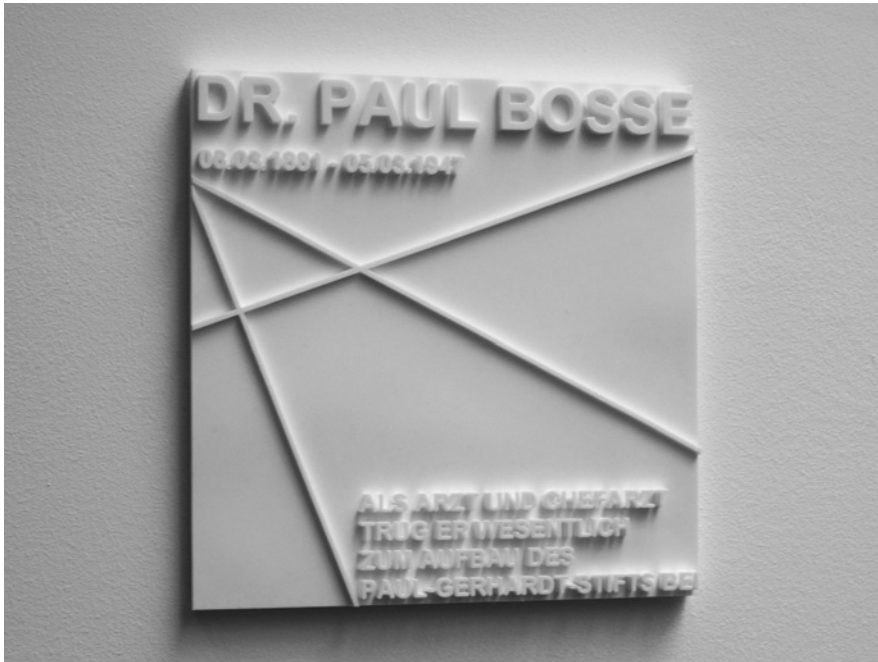
31 Wolfgang Böhmer, 'Das Krankenhaus Paul-Gerhardt-Stift im Wandel der Zeiten', in Peter Gierra, ed., *Impulse zur Diakonie in der Lutherstadt Wittenberg* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), pp. 40–104; also Wolfgang Böhmer et al., *Zur Geschichte des Wittenberger Gesundheits- und Sozialwesens. Teil IV: Die erste Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wittenberg: Stadtgeschichtlichen Museum, 1988).

32 U. and D. Stummeyer, *Paul Bosse, Seine Klinik in Wittenberg* (BoD Books on Demand GmbH, 2014).

33 Bräutigam, *Heilen und Unheil*.

34 Ibid., p. 8.





[Fig. 9] *Paul Bosse's commemorative plaque at the Paul-Gerhardt-Stift, Wittenberg, unveiled 2 April 2017*

For us as a family, the events of eighty years ago still stir deep emotions. We are fortunate that we have been able to keep the family's story alive for the next generations, and also to have gained a public acknowledgement of the family's persecution in Wittenberg. We have now a greater understanding of the mental anguish our mother must have suffered when she had to leave her native country, and also, one must admit, a deeper admiration of how her positive creativity allowed her to cope with her fate, and in turn, to contribute to the literature of her adopted country.