



The Holocaust and Wales

Aero Zipp Fasteners at Treforest Trading Estate

Created by the Centre for the Movement of People (CMOP) at Aberystwyth University



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This is resource 1 of 2 on the topic of Treforest Trading Estate and can be used alongside the other resource. The resources explore the stories of Jewish refugees who started businesses at the Treforest Trading Estate, near Pontypridd.

This resource is a case study of Aero Zipp Fasteners, a company set up by Joachim Koppel, a German-Jewish industrialist.

It contains:

- Background information about Treforest Trading Estate and where to find out more
- Useful definition: 'soundscape'
- Short biography of Joachim Koppel
- Map of Treforest Trading Estate
- Aerial photograph of Treforest Trading Estate
- Excerpt from newspaper article in *Pontypridd Observer* on Aero Zipp Fasteners
- Advertisement for Aero Zipp Fasteners

The resource assumes a basic understanding of the Holocaust. You may wish to cover the Holocaust Educational Trust's (HET) worksheet ['Defining the Holocaust'](#) before exploring these resources. See also the HET's ['General Principles for Teaching the Holocaust'](#).



Background information about Treforest Trading Estate

Treforest Trading Estate, later known as the Treforest Industrial Estate, was a Special Area set up as part of the Special Areas Act of 1934. The act targeted areas of high unemployment, such as South Wales, Tyneside and Scotland, offering incentives for businesses to establish themselves there.

British businessmen were largely uninterested in these areas, but when the Nazis began seizing Jewish businesses in 1938, several Jewish refugees took advantage of easily-acquired residence permits and significantly-reduced rents to start factories. For refugees fleeing the Continent, the ready availability of rented factory space was a necessity. They usually escaped with very little of their assets, and these factories allowed them to set up business remarkably quickly. Between April 1935 and July 1938, 187 refugee businesses were founded in Britain, but by August 1939, this had expanded to almost 500, of which more than 300 were located in Special Areas.

By May 1940, 55 firms started by Jewish refugees were operating out of Treforest, near Pontypridd, employing around 1,800 people. Some refugees went into business together after being introduced through the National Industrial Council of Wales and Monmouthshire. They helped reduce reliance on imports, in some cases establishing new technologies in Britain. Refugee firms produced a wide variety of goods. Toys, electrical goods, chemicals, cigarette papers, chocolate, plastics – even ‘unbreakable pencils’ – all were made at Treforest. Many had never been produced in Wales or Britain before. Welsh workers who had previously been unemployed from the coal mines, women who sought jobs outside of domestic service, and



teenagers leaving school suddenly had many new opportunities for work.

Some factories, such as Aero Zipp Fasteners, a zip-manufacturing business established by Berlin-born businessman Joachim Koppel, were requisitioned to aid the war effort. This factory created aircraft components for the Ministry of Aircraft Production, while Austrian Jew Otto Brill's Livia Leather Goods Ltd produced leather seat covers for Royal Air Force (RAF) aeroplanes. Julius and Moritz Mendle employed dozens of women at their factory, Mendle Bros., making plastic RAF goggles during the war, and toiletry goods in peace time.

Approximately 1,000 firms were established by refugees in Britain from the 1930s to the late 1940s. These businesses employed 250,000 people, significantly greater than the numbers of refugees who came to the country. According to the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1963, most businesses started by refugees at Treforest before the war remained in the area in the decades afterwards. Many of these refugee industrialists put down roots in South Wales, became important social and cultural leaders within their communities, and many of their families still live in the area today.

For more information on Treforest Trading Estate, see:

- <https://wp-research.aber.ac.uk/nsrefugeeswales/history/life-for-refugees-in-wales/treforest-industrial-estate/>
- https://webapps.rctcbc.gov.uk/heritagetrail/english/taf/trading_est.html

Books: Anthony Glaser, 'Jewish Refugees and Jewish Refugee Industries', pp 177-201 of Ursula Henriques (ed.), The Jews of South Wales (University of Wales Press, 1993); Andrea Hammel,



Finding Refuge: Stories of the men, women and children who fled to Wales to escape the Nazis (Honno, 2022), pp 72-99; Herbert Loebel, 'Refugee Industrialists in the Special Areas of Britain', pp 219-49 of Gerhard Hirschfeld (ed.), Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler's Germany (Berg, 1984)

What is a 'soundscape'?

A soundscape refers to audible sounds within a particular area or context. Every location has a soundscape, and they can include both natural and artificial sounds depending on where you are. They are unique and constantly changing: a woodland soundscape would be very different from that of a city, for example. We can try to recreate soundscapes through works of art or performance by layering up different sounds to create the atmospheric feeling of an environment or place.

For more information, see:

- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soundscape>



Historical source 1: Short biography of Joachim Koppel

Joachim Koppel was born in Berlin in 1892. In 1913, aged 21, he became a representative for a lead manufacturing business, and in the following years he worked at various metalmaking companies. By 1920, he was a director of a metal trade business based in Berlin's Tiergarten district. He and his business partner developed patents for the manufacture of zips which led to Joachim acquiring business interests in Poland, Romania, Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia and the UK.

As a prominent Jewish businessman, Joachim was at risk of persecution following the Nazi seizure of power in January 1933. After only two months, he had fled to Prague. The rest of his family soon followed. In 1938 he made the decision to move to Wales, but since his German citizenship had been revoked, he bought naturalisation documents and passports from the Costa Rican embassy in Prague. Joachim's son, Kurt, who had moved to London in 1936, convinced his father to come to the UK rather than Belgium. Although most of Joachim's family were able to escape to the UK, Paula Koppel (his first wife and the mother of his two eldest children) was unable to get out of Czechoslovakia. She was sent to Theresienstadt ghetto and murdered at the Treblinka death camp.

Joachim established Aero Zipp Fasteners Ltd alongside his brother Leo at Treforest Trading Estate in 1938. During the war, the factory was requisitioned to produce goods useful for the war effort: zips for RAF uniforms, precision tools and gauges for ordnance factories, and components for rifles, respirators and parachute bodies. It also printed a works magazine, *Punch and Die*, and boasted a successful amateur dramatic society, a factory

dance band, and a model and experimental engineering club. By 1947, the factory employed 450 people and even added an extension tripling its floor space. Joachim did not live to see this, however; he died in 1946 and Kurt became managing director of the company. By 1965, Aero Zipp contributed one third of all British zip exports.



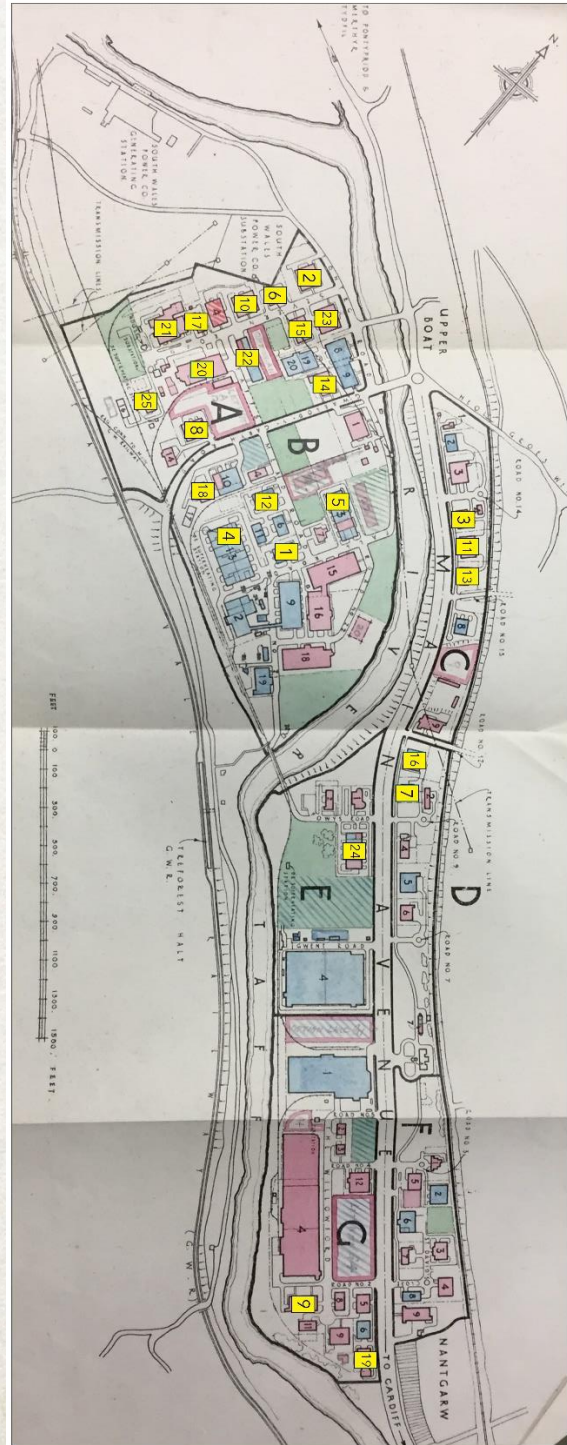
Historical source 2: Map of Treforest Trading Estate

1. Labin Co.; Arthur Weil Ltd.; Gustav Holzer Ltd.
2. Aero Zipp Fasteners
3. B. Prince & Co.; E.M. Manufacturing
4. Blossom Ltd.; Burlington Gloves Ltd.; General Music Strings Ltd.; Lionite Chemicals; Nova Oil & Solvent Co.
5. Burry Son & Co.; Mechanical Swiss Embroidery Co.; Mendle Bros. Ltd.; Micalectric Ltd.; Polya Leather Gloves
6. Cutrilin Ltd.; Perma Products
7. Elco (Treforest) Ltd.; J. Engl Ltd
8. Embee Abrasives Co.
9. Finetex Manufacturing (J. Loewenstern), H. Dixon & Son Western Brush
10. General Paper & Box Mfg. Ltd.
11. H. Stainer & Co.
12. Jacob Beatus Ltd.; Phoenix Straps (Grunberger & Co) Ltd.
13. Lion Leather Ltd.
14. Metal Alloys (S. Wales) Ltd.
15. Metal Products (Treforest) Ltd.
16. O.P. Chocolate Ltd.
17. Pearl Varnish Co. Ltd.
18. Rosedale
19. Steinburg Ltd.
20. Treforest Chemical Co.
21. Treforest Chrome Leather
22. Treforest Silk Printers Ltd.
23. Trehawk/Hawk Ltd.
24. Unbreakable Pencils & Chalks Ltd.
25. Western Board Mills Ltd.

Source: © Dr Tiffany Beebe

Link:

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/2114306>



Historical source 3: Aerial photograph of Treforest Trading Estate, 1938-9



Image author: Aerofilms Ltd.

Image source: People's Collection Wales (Creative Archive Licence)

Link: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/28626>

Historical Source 4: Excerpt from newspaper article in *Pontypridd Observer* on Aero Zipp Fasteners, 1968

[...]

Mr K.B. Koppel (chairman and managing director of Aero Zipp Fasteners Ltd.) pointed out that “Aero” came to Treforest exactly thirty years ago. It was then what was termed a distressed area. Looking back on those “bad old days” one could but marvel at the changes which had occurred.

Mr Koppel said he still remembered the dismal streets in the valley towns and villages, with men and youths hanging around street corners without jobs, without faith in the future and in fact with no apparent future at all.

[...]

Mr Koppel said he hoped he was not being immodest if he suggested that his company had made some small contribution to this development. “It has” he said “brought new products, new skills, and new techniques to the area, and this meant that right from the beginning emphasis had to be laid on the training of personnel.”

Source: ‘Wales must be promoted as the land of opportunity’, *Pontypridd Observer*, 5 December 1968, p. 13. Online via British Newspaper Archive

Link:

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003895/19681205/013/0013> (subscription required)



Historical Source 5: Advertisement for Aero Zipp Fasteners, 1969

**AERO ZIPP FASTENERS
LIMITED**

ONE OF THE LEADING
MANUFACTURERS OF ZIP FASTENERS
IN THE WORLD



AERO and AEROCOLOR METAL ZIPS
AEROLON NYLON ZIPS
AERO ADJUSTABLE FASTENERS
AERO — the SAFE Zip Fastener

AERO ZIPP FASTENERS

TREFOREST INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
PONTYPRIDD, GLAM.

Telephone : TREFOREST 2626

Sales Office : Aero House, Ealing Road, Wembley, Middlesex

Image: Jewish History Association of South Wales/Cymdeithas Hanes Iddewig De Cymru (JHASW/CHIDC)

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1777191> [Second image of the item]



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