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Urban internationalism: Coventry, Kiel, reconstruction and the role of cities in British- German reconciliation, 1945-49

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, municipal officials, religious dignitaries, business leaders, academics and other citizens of Coventry (an industrial centre with medieval origins in the English Midlands) and Kiel (a major Baltic Sea port founded in 1242 and located in the British occupation zone of postwar Germany) played a crucial role in rekindling relations between their respective nations. Their multifaceted initiatives of cultural exchange represent a postwar mentality in which loomed large the symbolism of the city ruined and rebuilt – a complex phenomenon which we term ‘urban internationalism’.¹ Following the creation of the Kiel-based voluntary group the Society of Friends of Coventry, a delegation from Coventry, including members of the city’s Association of Friends of Kiel and the Community of the Cross of Nails, visited the northern German city in September 1947 to forge closer links between the two municipalities. During this visit, the two lord mayors, Andreas Gayk (Kiel) and George Briggs (Coventry), invoked ‘a spirit of humanitarian friendship’ between the citizens of their home cities.² In addition, there was a symbolic exchange of gifts – modern relics from the rubble of their respective cities – that signified the peace-building, religious and urban dimensions of this municipal relationship: Provost Richard Howard bestowed his hosts with a cross fashioned from medieval nails reclaimed from the incinerated rooves of the ravaged Cathedral Church of Saint Michael, while members of Kiel’s clergy reciprocated with the gift of a stone from St Nikolai Church, which was severely damaged during an air raid on 22 May 1944, to be placed in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral.³

Central to the formation of ties between Kiel and Coventry was their shared experience of aerial bombardment during the Second World War, creating a ‘*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*’ (or community of

¹ V. Mamadouh and H. van der Wusten use the phrase ‘urban internationalism’ to summarise Clarke’s notion of ‘municipal internationalism’ (the establishment of transnational relations between cities or regions) in ‘The paradiplomacy of cities and regions: transnational relations between sub-state political entities’, in J. Dittmer and F. McConnell (eds.), *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics: Translations, Spaces and Alternatives* (Abingdon, 2015), 135-53 (p.138). By contrast, our use of ‘urban internationalism’ refers to the socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions of the city in such initiatives to connect municipalities transnationally.

² ‘Two cities – One spirit of humanitarian friendship!’, *Journal of the Society of Friends of Coventry (JSFC)*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947), 1. While this periodical was published in German and English, quotations in this article will be given in English only.

³ ‘Snapshots of the Kiel September Week’, *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947), 15; ‘Schleswig-Holstein’, in H. Beseler and N. Gutschow (eds.), *Kriegsschicksale Deutscher Architektur: Verluste – Schäden – Wiederaufbau. Eine Dokumentation für das Gebiet der Bundesrepublik*, 2 vols. (Neumünster, 1988), I, 4.

common experience and fate) between them.⁴ The impact of Allied and German bombing campaigns against the two wartime cities is crucial for understanding the origins of their twinning initiatives. As industrial centres relevant to the war effort (Coventry: aircraft, armaments and automobiles; Kiel: shipyards, armaments and home to a principal naval base), both cities were heavily bombed. Operation Moonlight Sonata was the name given to the Luftwaffe raid against Coventry on 14 November 1940 – a raid that lasted for 10 hours, killed 554 people and injured a further 864.⁵ Unlike Coventry, which suffered particularly from that infamous attack, the Allies continuously bombed Kiel during the war, resulting in some 78 per cent of the northern German city being destroyed.⁶ In terms of the bomb load it received, Kiel (30,000 tonnes) ranked sixth amongst urban areas in Germany behind Berlin (68,000 tonnes), Cologne (48,000), Hamburg (38,000), Essen (37,000) and Duisburg (31,000 tonnes). Over half of Kiel's population became homeless (c. 160,000), and every second job was lost because of Allied attacks.⁷ A sense in these cities of this shared history catalysed numerous twinning initiatives. In wartime, the *Coventry Telegraph* (6 October 1941) reported that women in the city were sending messages of support to their counterparts in Stalingrad (now Volgograd) during the siege of the city – a gesture reported in newspapers in the Russian city on the eve of the anniversary of the Coventry raid.⁸ Postwar, in addition to Coventry, officials in Kiel instigated twinning activities with Brest in northern France, home to a major naval base subjected to 165 raids dropping 8,425 tonnes of bombs between September 1940 and August 1944. Killing 403 citizens, this destruction earned Brest (among other cities including Coventry) the label of a 'martyred city', thus reviving a discourse of urban suffering and sacrifice that originated during the First World War in Belgium and France.⁹

⁴ Stadtarchiv Kiel (Kiel City Archives; KCA), 41105, 'Städtefreundschaften – Allgemeines', n.d., 1; Geelhaar, 'Kurzbericht über die 1947 begründete Städtefreundschaft Kiel-Coventry', 14 Nov. 1967. The authors are responsible for all English translations of German documents.

⁵ N. Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe: The Destruction of Historic Monuments During the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2001), 99; F. Taylor, *Coventry: Thursday, 14 November 1940* (London, 2015).

⁶ 'Schleswig-Holstein', 3.

⁷ A. Dallmann and J. Jensen, 'Einleitung', in A. Dallmann and J. Jensen (ed.), *'Geheim!': Meldungen vom Kieler Kriegsschauplatz. Die alliierten Luftangriffe in den Lageberichten des örtlichen Polizeipräsidenten 1940/45* (Husum, 2020), pp. 9-20 (p. 15).

⁸ Coventry City Council, 'Coventry to celebrate historic beginning of twinning of cities' (8 Apr. 2021) <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/news/article/3797/coventry-to-celebrate-historic-beginning-of-twinning-of-cities> accessed 12 Jan. 2023.

⁹ H. Grieser, 'Wiederaufstieg aus Trümmern (1945 bis in die Gegenwart)', in J. Jensen and P. Wulf (eds.), *Geschichte der Stadt Kiel* (Neumünster, 1991), 401-56 (p. 455); G. Bourges and A. de la Noë, *Brest: Ville héroïque et martyre* (Brest, 1946); P. Purseigle, 'La Cité de demain: French urbanism in war and reconstruction, 1914-1928', *French History*, 35 (2021), 505-31 (p. 508).

Just as many cities would have to be rebuilt from the ground up, many citizens' representatives engaged enthusiastically in bottom-up processes of peacebuilding, placing internationalist discourses at the centre of local initiatives.¹⁰ 'It is not for us to meddle with high politics and to form a sort of Hanseatic League or association of cities,' explained Andreas Gayk during a meeting with George Briggs in 1947: 'What we desire are relations of a different kind. Relations that are founded on pure and simple humanity.'¹¹ Notwithstanding such universal claims, given the social and political demography of the key players in the Coventry-Kiel link, this 'urban internationalism' was, by and large, the project and product of an urban elite.¹² Through its focus on mayors and other municipal staff, the Community of the Cross of Nails, the Society of Friends of Coventry and the Association of Friends of Kiel, this study explores the crucial roles that voluntary organizations and individual city officials assumed in town twinning arrangements—as a type of paradiplomacy at the sub-state level—at a time when Germany was still under an occupational military regime by the Allies.¹³

This article addresses the beginnings of the relationship between Coventry and Kiel to introduce and exemplify the idea of 'urban internationalism' as a new lens onto urban histories of town twinning initiatives and a contribution to the historiography of British town twinning¹⁴ – a research field that lags

¹⁰ For a conceptualization of such initiatives: Roger Mac Ginty, 'Hybrid peace: the interaction between top-down and bottom-up peace', *Security Dialogue*, 41 (2010), 391-412.

¹¹ KCA, Hauptamt, PII/66-09, 'Niederschrift über die Festsitzung der Stadtvertretung anlässlich der Herbstwoche "Kiel im Aufbau" am Dienstag, 16. September 1947'.

¹² This phenomenon was not unique to Coventry and Kiel, as C. Defrance and T. Herrmann demonstrate in 'Städtepartnerschaften: Ein Instrument der "Versöhnung" von unten?', in C. Defrance and U. Pfeil (eds.), *Verständigung und Versöhnung nach dem 'Zivilisationsbruch'? Deutschland in Europa nach 1945* (Brussels, 2016), 585-604.

¹³ Here, we draw inspiration from J. Garrard (ed.), *Heads of Local State: Mayors, Provosts and Burgomasters since 1800* (Aldershot, 2007); A. Langenohl, 'The merits of reciprocity: small-town twinning in the wake of the second world war', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 32 (2017), 557-76 (pp. 557-558); K. Plöger, 'The Hanover Club, Oxford (1911-13): student paradiplomacy and the coming of the Great War', *German History*, 27 (2009), 196-214; C. G. Krüger, *Dienstethos, Abenteuerlust, Bürgerpflicht: Jugendfreiwilligendienste in Deutschland und Großbritannien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2016).

¹⁴ S. Ewen, 'Transnational municipalism in a Europe of second cities: rebuilding Birmingham with municipal networks', in P.-Y. Saunier and S. Ewen (eds.), *Another Global City: Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850-2000* (Basingstoke, 2008), 101-18; N. Clarke, 'Town twinning in cold-war Britain: (dis)continuities in twentieth-century municipal internationalism', *Contemporary British History*, 24 (2010), 173-91; N. Clarke, 'Globalising care? Town twinning in Britain since 1945', *Geoforum*, 42 (2011), 115-25; J. Grosspietsch, 'The changing geographies of international municipal relations in Europe: a study of British-German town twinning partnerships', Loughborough University, Ph.D. thesis, 2010; M. Howarth, 'Coventry-Dresden, Manchester-Chemnitz, Aberdeen-Rostock: Städtepartnerschaften im Schatten des Kalten Krieges', *Deutschland Archiv*, 29 May 2015 <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/207012/coventry-dresden>

behind the more established study of Franco-German town twinning.¹⁵ In this, it goes beyond common threads in the existing historical literature that have often analysed town twinning as ‘municipal foreign policy’ or ‘municipal connections’ or focussed on town twinning organizations (‘transnational municipalism’).¹⁶ Through the case study of the pioneering work of the Kiel-Coventry initiatives, we argue that this historiography needs to be supplemented by studies that recognise and examine the symbolism and centrality of urban space in town twinning activity.¹⁷ Municipal officials responded to the symbolism of urban spaces, especially in the period after 1945, with public acts of friendship and solidarity taking place in resonant city locations, while twinning initiatives influenced the naming, use and image of reconstructed urban spaces and buildings. ‘Urban internationalism’, then, represents a vital prism through which to consider a range of important and entangled twentieth-century ‘internationalisms’ – that is, coordinated initiatives and formative discourses animated by a commitment to organizing transnational cooperation and communication to address issues of human

[manchester-chemnitz-aberdeen-rostock-staedtepartnerschaften-im-schatten-des-kalten-krieges/](#) accessed 12 Jan. 2023; M. Thießen, ‘Uneinige Zwillinge: Britisches “Town Twinning” während des Kalten Krieges’, in C. Defrance, T. Herrmann and P. Nordblom (eds.), *Städtepartnerschaften in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2020), 161-80; S. John, ‘Productive European cooperation between Britain and Germany: The Swansea-Mannheim town twinning partnership and exchanges between Wales and Baden-Württemberg, 1950-2000’, *Contemporary British History*, 36 (2022), 552-90.

¹⁵ Exemplary studies include: H. Simoneau, ‘Les jumelages entre villes françaises et est-allemandes (1959-1975)’, in C. Defrance, M. Kießner and P. Nordblom (ed.), *Wege der Verständigung zwischen Deutschen und Franzosen nach 1945: Zivilgesellschaftliche Annäherungen* (Tübingen, 2010), 255-69; L. Filipová, *Erfüllte Hoffnung: Städtepartnerschaften als Instrument der deutsch-französischen Aussöhnung, 1950-2000* (Göttingen, 2015); T. Herrmann, *Der zweite Deutsch-französische Städtepartnerschaftsboom (1985-1994): Akteure, Motive, Widerstände und Praxis* (Berlin, 2019).

¹⁶ See the November issue of *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002); S. Couperus, ‘In between “Vague Theory” and “Sound Practical Lines”: transnational municipalism in interwar Europe’, in D. Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London, 2011), 67-89; Ewen, ‘Transnational municipalism’, 101-18; T. Erlenbusch, *Kiels Städtepartnerschaften: Die kommunale Außenpolitik der Stadt Kiel von der frühen Nachkriegszeit bis ans Ende der Neunzigerjahre* (Kiel, 2022).

¹⁷ Our study builds on historical work that problematizes issues within town twinning: Defrance, Herrmann and Nordblom (ed.), *Städtepartnerschaften*. In addition, studies by geographers on the spatial dimensions of town twinning and internationalism inform our approach: J. Grosspietsch, ‘More than food and folk music? Geographical perspectives on European town twinning’, *Geography Compass*, 3 (2009), 1281-1304 (p. 1281); M. Herren, ‘Geneva, 1919–1945: the spatialities of public internationalism and global networks’, in H. Jöns, P. Meusburger and M. Heffernan (eds.), *Mobilities of Knowledge* (Cham, 2017), 211-26. Finally, we draw inspiration from sociological work on the practices of town twinning: A. Langenohl, *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections and Trans-local Citizenship Practices in Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015).

welfare and advance peacebuilding – as identified by Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin.¹⁸ Indeed, as outlined in the first section of this article, ‘urban internationalism’ can be considered an umbrella term or a multifaceted phenomenon in which nested a range of other internationalist drives – secular and religious, political and paradiplomatic.

This article focuses on the period from the end of the war until the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1949. The main discussion is organized both chronologically and thematically and progresses in four stages. First, we offer further consideration of the multifaceted nature of ‘urban internationalism’ as a postwar phenomenon grounded in urban communities’ wartime experiences. Then, we explore the formation process of the Community of the Nail of the Cross in Coventry and activities undertaken by this group. The subsequent part examines the role of the Society of Friends of Coventry in Kiel in this process, before another section focuses on the 1947 visit by a delegation from Coventry to Kiel. A conclusion then summarizes the main findings.

Urban internationalism in the postwar moment

The strategic bombing campaigns over Europe during the Second World War provided the immediate context in which urban internationalism emerged after 1945.¹⁹ The first RAF raid against Germany took place on 4 September 1939, targeting Wilhelmshaven (Germany’s main naval base in the North Sea) and Brunsbüttel (the Western entrance to the Kiel Canal some 100 km west of Kiel). This attack was often inaccurately represented in the British wartime press as an attack on the city of Kiel itself, albeit the first major raid on Kiel did not occur until 2 July 1940.²⁰ Coverage in the British press of the aftermath of the Luftwaffe raid on Coventry quickly made the destruction of November 1940 a national event, not simply a local story. On 16 November 1940 the *Birmingham Gazette* carried the headline, ‘Coventry – Our Guernica’.²¹ This comparison to the Luftwaffe’s bombing of civilians on 26 April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War – an air raid made infamous by George Steer’s reporting in *The Times* and Picasso’s monumental monochrome painting – helped mark Coventry out as another seminal event in the new era of bombing war. *The Times* reported the ‘King’s visit to Bombed Coventry’ and an accompanying photograph showed the monarch and the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, witnessing the aftermath.²² Images of dignitaries seeing and being shown what had happened were repeated in *Illustrated London News* with the Provost of the ruined cathedral guiding the king and Home Secretary

¹⁸ G. Sluga and P. Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017).

¹⁹ For an overview: R. Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe, 1939-1945* (Harmondsworth, 2013).

²⁰ C. Laucht, ‘Der Nord-Ostsee-Kanal in der britischen Strategie und Propaganda zu Beginn des Zweiten Weltkrieges’, *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte*, 138 (2013), 241-63; J. Jensen, *Kiel im Zeitalter der Weltkriege: Fotografierte Stadt- und Zeitgeschichte 1914 bis 1945* (Husum, 2017), 312.

²¹ Cited in O. Schuegraf, *The Cross of Nails: Joining in God’s Mission of Reconciliation* (Norwich, 2012), 4.

²² ‘The King’s visit to bombed Coventry’, *The Times*, 18 Nov. 1940, 6.

through the rubble.²³ These representations tie the individual experience of Coventry citizens into a national script of the Blitz, and also stress the loss of built heritage as the defining characteristic of the event, over the loss of life or disruption of industry. In other words, ‘architectural casualties’ – the heritage of the British nation – became the focus of the news story.²⁴

While parallels were drawn with Guernica in the English Midlands, in wartime Germany the results of Operation Moonlight Sonata were represented as unparalleled. National Socialist propaganda championed the attack on Coventry as an unprecedented success and demonstration of military might with a new verb coined – *coventrieren* (often translated into English as ‘to coventrate’ or ‘to coventrize’) – to capture the supposedly unmatched levels of destruction achieved by the Luftwaffe and to promote the devastating efficacy of aerial warfare.²⁵ Thus, in Britain and Germany alike, the representation in word and image of bombing and its aftermath held a prominent place in media coverage of the war from the outset. The image of Coventry and the neologism *coventrieren* – both of which also circulated in the American illustrated magazine *Life* via photographs by George Rodger which were said to show the ‘Essence of Coventrizing [...] in this litter of rubble that once was a respectable street of houses’ – highlight the centrality of media representations of urban space and architecture to wartime experience.²⁶

Allied air raids against Germany escalated substantially during the war, shifting from attacks on military and industry targets, to raids on residential districts and workers’ morale. Such ‘morale bombing’ was to cause far greater destruction to German cities as the war continued, including to churches and cathedrals. As Allied bombing intensified, Operation Moonlight Sonata remained a key reference point. The thousand-bomber raids on Cologne and Hamburg in 1942 were widely championed, while the raid on Hamburg that induced a firestorm was billed by the *Daily Telegraph* as the equivalent of ‘60 Coventries’.²⁷ By the end of the war, Kiel had experienced a total of 90 Allied attacks, the final raid being carried out on the night of 2 to 3 May 1945.²⁸ British troops occupied Kiel

²³ ‘The devastation of Coventry by Nazi air raider on November 14’, *Illustrated London News*, 23 Nov. 1940, cover and 659.

²⁴ The term ‘architectural casualties’ was used by J.M. Richards in *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties, 1940-41* (Cheam, 1942).

²⁵ On the genesis and a contemporary assessment of the verb ‘to coventrate’: V. Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii. A Philologist’s Notebook* (1947; London, 2000), 126-7.

²⁶ ‘Germany’s bombing of Coventry: “We’re Ruined But We’re Not Beaten”,’ *Life*, 23 Dec. 1940, 9-13.

²⁷ Cited in A.C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Is the Targeting of Civilians in War Ever Justified?* (London, 2006), 192-193. The newspaper also offered a tally for Cologne, Düsseldorf and Essen which were said to represent 17, 12 and 10 ‘Coventries’ respectively.

²⁸ Jensen, *Kiel im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, 313.

on 4 May 1945 only days before the end of the Second World War.²⁹ At war's end, the popular British photomagazine *Picture Post* captured the impact of this sustained campaign in a cover story from October 1945 entitled 'Kiel: Graveyard of German Seapower'.³⁰ Located in the British zone of occupation, Kiel subsequently became the capitol of the state of Schleswig-Holstein.³¹

In the mid-1940s, with discussion of reconstruction gathering pace across Europe, urban space was heavily freighted with symbolic importance when it came to securing the peace that followed conflict. This resonance for questions of urbanism and architecture tapped into the tradition of world's expositions of the early twentieth century that functioned as potential sites for showcasing 'progress' and promoting transnational communication and understanding.³² It was also entangled with the interwar discourse of architectural modernism as an 'international style' and panacea for various social and political challenges. The significance of the city was immeasurably heightened, however, by citizens' experience of the urban destruction by aerial bombardment of the Second World War. Throughout the war years, public debate about reconstruction had been used to buoy nations' commitment to the war effort across multiple countries. So, just as the city was a site of fear and loss in wartime, it was also a space of hope and opportunity postwar.³³ Moreover, intellectual and emotional investment in urban spaces meant that towns and cities were symbolically important not only as a measure of postwar rebuilding; urban spaces were also mobilized in efforts towards reconciliation and the reconstruction of peaceful relations between citizens in former enemy nations. The image and idea of 'the city' in mid-twentieth-century Europe was a vital symbolic resource for the complex and interactive challenges of reconstruction in the wake of the Second World War.³⁴ Towns and cities offered a culturally salient stage for the public performance of a range of reconstruction efforts – one imbued with postwar priorities deriving from the rhetoric of the Atlantic Charter of humanitarianism, democracy and recovery. The salient role of urbanism and architecture in such mediated public diplomacy towards reconciliation and democratisation is exemplified by the first issue of the photomagazine produced by British occupation forces for postwar German citizens, *Blick in die Welt*. A photo-story on 'Destruction and Reconstruction in Europe' included a historic picture of a night-time

²⁹ K. Jürgensen, 'Towards occupation: first encounters in north Germany', in U. Jordan (ed.), *Conditions of Surrender: Britons and Germans Witness the End of the War* (London, 1997), 53-66; R. Dopheide, *Kiel, Mai 1945: Britische Truppen besetzen die Kriegsmarinestadt* (Kiel, 2007), 49-53.

³⁰ 'Kiel: graveyard of German seapower', *Picture Post*, 6 Oct. 1945, 1.

³¹ K. Jürgensen, *Die Gründung des Landes Schleswig-Holstein: Der Aufbau der demokratischen Ordnung in Schleswig-Holstein während der britischen Besatzungszeit 1945-1949*, 2nd ed. (Neumünster, 1998).

³² A. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, 1997), 31.

³³ On the histories of postwar emotions: F. Biess and R.G. Moeller (ed.), *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (Oxford, 2010).

³⁴ See T. Allbeson, *Photography, Reconstruction and the Cultural History of the Postwar European City* (London, 2020).

service in ruins, the caption revealing that it showed a remembrance service held on the first anniversary of the Coventry bombing. Thus, after 1945 the image of Coventry was used to craft an image and script of postwar Europe, as opposed to a British wartime one.³⁵

In this article, we examine the priority given to urban space by civil society associations and non-state actors including municipal, intellectual and religious leaders as well as ‘ordinary’ citizens. We look at how reconstruction and reconciliation initiatives by secular, religious and political actors and groups mobilized the image and idea of the postwar city. After 1945 urban internationalism appeared to offer an antidote to state-sanctioned nationalism held responsible for bringing about two world wars within just decades.³⁶ A bottom-up-approach envisaged towns and cities as chief agents for fostering international understanding, peace, European reconciliation and integration. The relationship between Coventry and Kiel formed part of a first cycle of town twinning that lasted from the end of the Second World War until the start of the new decade. During this period, twinning activity chiefly focused on restoring links between cities in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.³⁷ As well as a nascent focus on European unity, what further differentiated postwar from interwar town twinning was the fact that cities and towns like Coventry and Kiel sought to establish closer, more substantial social and cultural links than during the interwar period.³⁸ Albeit often led by urban elites,

³⁵ ‘Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau in Europa’, *Blick in die Welt* (Mar. 1946), 3-8 (p.6).

³⁶ The interwar history of intermunicipal relationships is multifaceted and complex. In 1925 Kiel formed a town sponsorship (*Städtepatenschaft*) with Sønderborg to support the German minority in southern Denmark in the wake of the 1920 referendum on the German-Danish border. (I. Bautz, ‘Die Auslandsbeziehungen der deutschen Kommunen im Rahmen der europäischen Kommunalbewegung in den 1950er und 60er Jahren’, Siegen University Ph.D. thesis, 2002, 38-39). While interwar German *Städtepatenschaften* had a nationalist motivation, by contrast, some 80 British towns and cities ‘adopted’ 95 war-torn villages and towns – so-called ‘martyred cities’ – in France through financial contributions towards their reconstruction (J.E. Connolly, “‘Alliierte’ über den Krieg hinaus: Britische Zeitungen und “Patenschaften” mit französischen Städten nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg’, in Defrance, Herrmann and Nordblom (eds.), *Städtepartnerschaften*, 217–35). If such town adoptions came much closer to the ideals of postwar ‘urban internationalism’ than *Städtepatenschaften*, they were still much looser. At the same time, disillusionment and frustration over the failures of the League of Nations to promote internationalism and unsuccessful attempts to achieve Franco-German rapprochement through the 1925 Treaty of Locarno had previously led to an alternative vision (or a “‘Locarno from below’”). The nature of and motivation behind many twinships differed considerably after 1945, yet such a vision contributed to the later emergence of postwar ‘urban internationalism’ as we characterise it here.

³⁷ S. Couperus and D. Vrhoci, ‘A profitable friendship, still? Town twinning between Eastern and Western European cities before and after 1989’, in E. Braat and P. Corduwener (eds.), *1989 and the West: Western Europe since the Ende of the Cold War* (London, 2019), 143-60 (p. 146).

³⁸ O. Gaspari, ‘Cities against states? Hopes, dreams and shortcomings of the European municipal movement, 1900-1960’, *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002), 597-622 (pp. 604-5).

they aimed to cater for a wider social demographic than, say, Franco-German town twinning arrangements during the 1920s, giving rise to a distinctly postwar urban internationalism that offered an alternative route to transnational understanding and reconciliation.³⁹

In the case of Coventry and Kiel, four distinct twentieth-century ‘internationalisms’ intersected. The Society of Friends of Coventry principally professed a secular type of internationalism that was based on ideas of a world government and human rights around the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations (UN) and that advocated early proposals for European social and economic integration.⁴⁰ In this, the voluntary group followed ‘a popular emotional geographic turn [...] away from notions of the nation as a redemptive force and towards local and regional places as geographies of renewal that offered spaces of life after death and sources of early democratic and European identification’, as Jeremy DeWaal has generally observed for West Germany in the early postwar period.⁴¹ By contrast, the Community of the Cross of Nails advocated what Abigail Green classifies as ecumenical ‘religious internationalism’.⁴² A third type referred to ‘socialist internationalism’ and was based on transnational links between the two political parties, the Labour Party and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) that dominated Coventry and Kiel City Councils.⁴³ Finally, towards the end of the period under investigation, the emergence of the bipolar world order—represented by the establishment of two German states at the end of the decade—precipitated Cold War internationalisms which recast the relationship between humanist, religious and socialist internationalism that had unfolded in the immediate postwar years.⁴⁴ In addressing the Kiel-Coventry dynamic between 1945 and 1949 in depth, we aim to articulate the mediated and interactive dimensions of the multifaceted and multidirectional municipal and ecumenical internationalist efforts – a layered and interactive phenomenon we term ‘urban internationalism’.

Religious internationalism and the meaning of ‘Coventry’

³⁹ Bautz, ‘Die Auslandsbeziehungen der deutschen Kommunen’, 37; Langenohl, ‘The Merits of Reciprocity’, 559.

⁴⁰ A. Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2002), 67-103; G. Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013), 79-117; R. Burke, ‘The internationalism of human rights’, in Sluga and Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms*, 287-314; S.-L. Hoffmann (ed.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2010); D. Dinan (ed.), *Origins and Evolution of the European Union*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2014).

⁴¹ J. DeWaal, ‘*Heimat* as a geography of postwar renewal: life after death and local democratic identities in Cologne, 1945-1965’, *German History*, 36 (2018), 229-251 (pp. 229-230).

⁴² A. Green, ‘Religious Internationalisms’, in Sluga and Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms*, 17-37 (p. 18).

⁴³ T. Imbay, ‘Socialist Internationalism after 1914’, in Sluga and Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms*, 213-41. It also built on and was representative of socialist influences in ‘European municipalism’. See P. Dogliani, ‘European municipalism in the first half of the twentieth century: the socialist network’, *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002), 573-96.

⁴⁴ S. Kott, ‘Cold War Internationalism’, in Sluga and Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms*, 340-62.

Images of destroyed or resilient religious buildings stood for the wartime experience of urban centres and their citizens – ‘ruined but [...] not beaten’ (as characterised in *Life* magazine’s coverage).⁴⁵ Coventry’s ruined cathedral became one of the central architectural icons of the Blitz, along with St Paul’s, photographed by Herbert Mason during the bombing of London on 29 December 1940. These two images, the ruins at Coventry and the dome of St Paul’s, possessed complementary symbolism: ‘The former was a sign of sacrifice and the promise of resurrection; the latter, a symbol of resilience and right against wrong’.⁴⁶ Thus, the destructive impact of the bombing of Coventry was quickly ‘aestheticized as a crime against the city (symbolized [...] by its cathedral) and thus as a simultaneous blow to religion, architecture, and history’.⁴⁷ The religious dimension of this symbolism was important because of notions of sacrifice and intimations of rebirth, but also because of the implications of moral rectitude. Indeed, Mason’s photograph of St Paul’s was the cover image of a 1942 pamphlet (*They Would Destroy the Church of God*) contrasting statements by Nazi leaders with British church leaders including a reprinting of ecumenical principles (originally published in *The Times*) supported by Free, Anglican and Catholic church leaders and prioritising issues of human welfare, such as tackling inequality and education, over nationalism.⁴⁸ Coventry was referred to as a ‘martyred city’ – a phrase with obvious religious overtones that would later be used for other towns, like Caen.⁴⁹ This ‘discourse of urban victimhood’ emerged in Belgium and France during the First World War, as Pierre Purseigle observes, and ‘drew on the model of Christian and catholic martyrdom so familiar to French and Belgian, as well as to many neutral, societies’.⁵⁰

While wartime media representation of the bombing of Coventry in terms of ‘German vandals’ versus ‘resilient Brits’ may have constituted the dominant discourse surrounding the cathedral, from the morning after the raid a number of symbolic acts established alternative perspectives or ways of looking at both war ruins and Germans for British citizens. The immediate response of the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, Reverend Richard Howard (who had held the post from 1933 to 1958) was centred on reconciliation – coming to terms with both the experience and the enemy. From the morning after

⁴⁵ ‘Germany’s Bombing of Coventry: “We’re Ruined But We’re Not Beaten”,’ *Life*, 23 Dec. 1940, 9-13.

⁴⁶ Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, 117.

⁴⁷ L. Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral: Art and Architecture in Post-war Britain* (Oxford, 1996), 10.

⁴⁸ The pamphlet was published by Hodder and Stoughton for the Ministry of Information. These principles were earlier promoted in a *Times* editorial (‘Foundations’, *The Times*, 21 Dec. 1940, 5). Regarding the stance of the Church of England towards the bombing of Germany during the war, see A. Chandler, ‘The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing of Germany in the Second World War’, *The English Historical Review*, 108 (1993), 920–46.

⁴⁹ E.g. P. Adam, *Caen: Cité martyre* (Caen, 1945).

⁵⁰ P. Purseigle, ‘Catastrophe and reconstruction in Western Europe: the urban aftermath of the first world war’, in L. Verpoest et al. (eds.), *Revival after the Great War: Rebuild, Remember, Repair, Reform* (Leuven, 2020), 37-53 (p. 41).

the raid a number of important gestures offered tolerant or compassionate perspectives or ways of looking at both war ruins and Germans. At first, these were marginal, but they were to become more central in the postwar period. The decision to rebuild the cathedral was announced by Howard in the *Coventry Standard* on 30 November 1940: ‘The Cathedral will rise again. It will be rebuilt and will be as great a pride to the generations of the future as to the generations of the past’. Those associated with the cathedral also initiated a number of symbolic acts which were to become decisive ways of framing Coventry, forging its significance in the postwar period. These were simultaneously material interventions in the war-damaged fabric of the building and efforts to craft meaningful icons from what remained. They included the building of a ‘rubble altar’ (made from the rubble of the ruined church) in January 1941 on which was placed a ‘charred cross’ (made of charred beams from the medieval roof). Such gestures and symbols - using ‘relics’ from the bombed cathedral and communicated through pamphlets and media coverage – articulated notions of sacrifice and rebirth, reinforced by pertinent ceremonies held in the ruins, such as the Good Friday and Easter Sunday services in 1941.⁵¹

Such public gestures and symbolic assertions took place within a wider British debate about postwar reconstruction that began early in the war in the face of uncertainty about the duration or outcome of the conflict. Mirroring the coverage of the Blitz – and frequently spliced with it – this discussion prioritised architecture and urbanism as the key site of renewal and reconstruction in the fated moment after victory. Early instructions from the Ministry of Information to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in March 1941 outlined optimum ways to frame the bombing raids, asserting that, ‘[d]amage should never be minimised’ but that priority should be given to the discussion of reconstruction to ‘shift attention from the present to the future’.⁵² While Coventry assumed a decisively central role in the picture of wartime Britain, this position was both further embedded and reconfigured in the cultural politics of the reconstruction debate. Donald Gibson, who led the City of Coventry Architectural and Planning Department, had been planning a radical modernisation of the city even before its destruction.⁵³ Prior to the raid, these plans had been publicised in a week-long exhibition, ‘Coventry of tomorrow: towards a beautiful city’ (6-13 May 1940) organised by Percy Johnson-Marshall and the Coventry Branch of the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical

⁵¹ R. T. Howard, *The Story of the Destruction of Coventry Cathedral, 14th November 1940* (Coventry, 1941).

⁵² I. McClaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London, 1979), 129-131.

⁵³ K.D. Lilley, ‘Conceptions and perceptions of urban futures in early post-war Britain: some everyday experiences of the rebuilding of Coventry, 1944-62’ in I. Boyd Whyte (ed.), *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Abingdon, 2007), 145-56.

Assistants.⁵⁴ Coventry's chief architect and the plans for redevelopment along modernist town planning principles gained further publicity in the wake of the city's destruction – an international prominence that would continue into the 1950s and beyond as the remodelling and rebuilding of Coventry proceeded.⁵⁵ Thus, the debate about reconstruction was not simply focused on architecture and cities, but as with the reporting of the Blitz had a strong psychological dimension, offering a future different from the present and the past – a future worth fighting for.

The work of reconciliation begun by Provost Howard from the outset was also an internationalist phenomenon exhibiting continuity from the early to late 1940s, notwithstanding the war years. For instance, opposing division with reconciliation, the idea of a Chapel of Unity at the site of the ruined Cathedral was proposed in 1944, and the first sacred space at Coventry to bear that name was built under the ruins in 1945. The following year, a Catholic priest from Hamburg led services in the subterranean chapel.⁵⁶ Two years later the words 'Father forgive' were carved into the wall of the ruined nave behind the rubble altar. Through such words, actions and symbols, Coventry became established as a site of unity and reconciliation, rather than destruction and division. Thus, those associated with Coventry sought to shape the meaning of architecture and the direction of international relations in the period of postwar reconstruction through efforts towards religious internationalism in which the image of the city and the materiality of the cathedral was key. This group of religious leaders and aspiring peace-builders sought to retool divisive representations and forge new symbols to support postwar initiatives to create positive post-conflict links and dialogue – Coventry Cathedral, having been central to wartime iconography was thus central also to the 'iconoclasm' or contest of images which the movement from wartime destruction to postwar reconstruction exemplified.⁵⁷ As Lagrou argues, reconstruction in postwar Belgium, France and Netherlands was often conceived as a national project: 'National recovery implied material reconstruction and economic growth, political restoration and national reconciliation, the reinvention of national identities'.⁵⁸ The same is true for many contributions to public debate in postwar Britain and occupied Germany including religious leaders. Furthermore,

⁵⁴ Edinburgh University Library Special Collections, "'Coventry of tomorrow" exhibition', available at: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/19596a3c-5096-3380-bb67-4b71ac0e6db9?component=360e28f4-2424-323b-8a07-93422934e459> accessed 12 Jan. 2023.

⁵⁵ A neo-gothic design for a new building on the site developed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was dropped in 1946 and an architectural competition launched in 1951. Regarding the Harlech Report of 1947, which followed the decision to drop Scott's design and recommended an architectural competition, see L. Campbell, 'Towards a New Cathedral: The Competition for Coventry, 1950-51', *Architectural History* 35 (1992), 208-34.

⁵⁶ *War Illustrated*, 20 Dec. 1946, 549.

⁵⁷ B. Latour, 'What is iconoclasm?' in S. Manghani et al. (eds.), *Images: A Reader* (London, 2006), 309-14.

⁵⁸ P. Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge, 2000), 15.

that same debate also looked towards the establishment of transnational co-operation in Europe to secure the foundations of peace. The notion of reconstruction became freighted with metaphorical meaning, with arguments advanced for psychological reconstruction. In this context, work at Coventry Cathedral was about reconstruction, about reconciliation and about ‘peacebuilding’ – not simply about building peace but *using buildings to secure peace*; mobilizing the symbolism of cities to forge new relationships between citizens.

Actions, words and symbols worked to establish Coventry as a site of unity and reconciliation (even sacrifice and rebirth), rather than destruction and division.⁵⁹ The most important material and visual symbol of this ecumenical peace-building initiative associated with Coventry Cathedral in the immediate aftermath of war was the Cross of Nails – a small cross made from the binding together of medieval nails scattered in the rubble when the beams in which they were lodged were incinerated.⁶⁰ The Cross of Nails was first created by an associate of Howard who recalled its creation in the aftermath of the raid.⁶¹ The provost also recalled placing a Cross of Nails into the hands of visiting German ‘pilgrims.’⁶² Early recipients of a Cross of Nails in the 1940s included Winston Churchill and his wife (October 1941), Princess Elizabeth (May 1948) and the Mayor of Caen (May 1948).⁶³ The object of the Cross of Nails—as suggested by the Provost’s anecdote about pressing it into the hands of visitors—was a sort of relic, providing a physical connection to the past in the same way that the ruins did. But like the ruins, this material connection needed to be made intelligible and to be communicated for it to have the intended impact on audiences.

It is a mistake to think of the immediate postwar years as a period of religious decline, rather as Brown has argued there was a postwar religious boom in Britain.⁶⁴ In Western Germany, there was an effort to recuperate religion in the wake of the Führer cult inculcated by Nazism. Likewise, van Dam and van Trignt assert ‘the dynamic role of religion before and after the 1960s, its complex relationship

⁵⁹ Howard gave voice to this connection when he later wrote that the destruction of the medieval building was ‘in some mysterious way a participation in the infinite sacrifice of the crucifixion of Christ’ (R. T. Howard, *Ruined and Rebuilt: The Story of Coventry Cathedral, 1939-1962* (Coventry, 1962), 16). Spence in turn suggested that ‘As the ruins stand for the Sacrifice, so the new Cathedral speaks of the Resurrection’ (B. Spence and H. Snoek, *Out of the Ashes* (London, 1962).

⁶⁰ The Cross of Nails was first created by an associate of Howard in the winter of 1940/41 (Howard, *Ruined and Rebuilt*, 24).

⁶¹ Howard, *Ruined and Rebuilt*, 24.

⁶² Howard cited in S. Goebel, ‘Commemorative cosmopolis: transnational networks of remembrance in post-war Coventry’, in S. Goebel and D. Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham, 2011), 163–83 (p.178).

⁶³ Schuegraf, *The Cross of Nails*, 25-8.

⁶⁴ On this postwar boom: C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, 2009).

to modes of social organisation and the ways in which transformation of these modes come about, through both the development of competing visions of the social role of religion'.⁶⁵ For instance, the British occupation forces also saw a valuable mechanism in the involvement of religious organisations in the management of welfare issues in postwar Germany. As Graham-Dixon has shown, the idea of a Christian mission in postwar Germany became instrumentalised by British occupiers in the Control Commission of Germany (CCG). For church leaders the 'moral mandate' was 'a case of genuine self-perception', while for the British government and its representatives, it was 'a matter of rhetorical presentation or projection': 'interventions by the churches in Britain were used to present a moral face to an increasingly difficult military political occupation'.⁶⁶ It is within this context that the religious internationalism exemplified by Howard and his work of reconciliation with the Cross of Nails should be viewed, since the religious interventions in occupied Germany were 'unofficially encouraged in Whitehall to act as an acceptable face of British rule, and its Christian principles could be invoked to make occupation more palatable to both occupiers and occupied'⁶⁷ – an initiative promoted via CCG publications, such as *British Zone Review*. The importance of Christianity and church reconstruction in Western Zones of occupied Germany became even more important as the conflict with communism escalated, the Soviet Union being characterised as a godless enemy, just as Nazism had been a few years earlier. Indeed, as German municipal leaders became distrustful or disgruntled about occupation actions about key issues like dismantling industry or displaced persons, the church was instrumentalised to present a positive image of the British in Germany notwithstanding tensions and contradictions between the churches' aims and rhetoric and the government's policies and pitfalls.

Kiel, socialist internationalism and the discourse of political and private spheres

On the Kiel end, the Society of Friends of Coventry was crucial for starting the reconciliation process with Coventry. Amongst other things, it exercised a particular type of urban internationalism that related to the ideals of democratic socialism. Central to the group's aims and objectives was the semantic reversal of the infamous creation by the National Socialist propaganda 'to coventrate' ('*coventrieren*').⁶⁸ 'If in future we speak of "coventrating",' elaborated Andreas Gayk on this objective in the context of the formation of the Society of Friends of Coventry, 'it must mean cultivation of

⁶⁵ P. van Dam and P. van Trigt, 'Religious regimes: rethinking the societal role of religion in post-war Europe', *Contemporary European History*, 24 (2015), 213-32 (p. 214)

⁶⁶ F. Graham-Dixon, 'A "Moral Mandate" for occupation: the British churches and voluntary organizations in North-Western Germany, 1945–1949', *German History*, 28 (2010), 193–213 (pp. 193, 195).

⁶⁷ Graham-Dixon, "'Moral Mandate'", 204.

⁶⁸ KCA, 33672, 'Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys', n.d., 1.

friendly relations between country and country, it must mean the overcoming of national passions for the benefit of the common tasks of all the peoples of Europe'.⁶⁹ To achieve this, the group pledged to adhere 'to the spirit of agile democracy, true humanity, practicing international understanding and supranational political lifeforms' that was based on 'mutual respect between the nations'. At the same time, the group vowed to leave 'political actions' to political parties and governments and limit 'its activity to the private sphere'.⁷⁰

Gayk was a major driving force behind the establishment of the Society of Friends of Coventry. Kiel's lord mayor had personal experiences of war: not only was he drafted into the German army in the First World War but lost his two sons during the Second World War and witnessed the aerial bombardment of German cities and towns at first hand.⁷¹ Elected to the office of lord mayor for the SPD in October 1946 that he held until his death in 1954, Gayk laid some of the programmatic groundwork for the Society of Friends of Coventry in an essay on 'International Understanding between Cities' ('Völkerverständigung von Stadt zu Stadt') in May 1947. Like senior members of the postwar SPD such as Erich Ollenhauer, Gayk represented a new type of party functionary who was recruited from middle- rather than working-class backgrounds and who shaped social democratic policies in West Germany.⁷² Unlike his predecessor, Lord Mayor Willi Koch (Christian Democratic Union), who had receded into a state of internal emigration during the time of National Socialism, Gayk had openly opposed the National Socialist dictatorship.⁷³

What contributed significantly to Gayk's popularity was his leading role in organizing the postwar reconstruction of Kiel's social and economic life.⁷⁴ In particular Gayk's opposition to plans by

⁶⁹ A. Gayk, 'Message to Coventry', reprinted in, *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 8.

⁷⁰ KCA, 33672, 'Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys', 1-2.

⁷¹ M. Freund, 'Bild eines Kämpfers', in J. Jensen and K. Rickers (eds.), *Andreas Gayk und seine Zeit 1893-1954: Erinnerungen an den Kieler Oberbürgermeister* (Neumünster, 1974), 33-40 (pp. 34, 36).

⁷² KCA, 33672, A. Gayk, 'Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys: Völkerverständigung von Stadt zu Stadt. Der Informationsbrief, Teil A – Abschnitt I. Thema 5: Städte und Kreise, Beitrag 3 vom 2.5. 1947'; P. Lösche and F. Walter, *Die SPD: Klassenpartei, Volkspartei, Quotenpartei* (Darmstadt, 1992), 70; H. Martens, 'Zur Rolle von Andreas Gayk in der Kommunal- und Landespolitik 1945-1954', *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Kieler Stadtgeschichte*, 79 (1995-99), 241-76.

⁷³ U. Danker and S. Lehmann-Himmel, *Landespolitik mit Vergangenheit: Geschichtswissenschaftliche Aufarbeitung der personellen und strukturellen Kontinuität in der schleswig-holsteinischen Legislative und Exekutive nach 1945* (Husum, 2017), 274; Martens, 'Zur Rolle von Andreas Gayk', 241.

⁷⁴ See the programmatic speeches: A. Gayk, *Eine Stadt kämpft um ihre Zukunft!* (Kiel, 1946); 'Oberbürgermeister Andreas Gayk vor der Außerordentlichen Sitzung der Kieler Stadtvertretung zur Haushaltssitzung für das Rechnungsjahr 1947', in Stadtverwaltung Kiel (ed.), *Kiels Friedensarbeit beginnt! Rede des Oberbürgermeisters Gayk zur Haushaltssitzung der Stadt Kiel, Rede des Stadtrats Nickelsen zur Haushaltssitzung der Stadt Kiel.*

the British occupation authorities to demolish shipyards and industrial plants in Kiel between 1946 and 1949 proved to be very popular with voters and had helped him secure his election as lord mayor in the autumn of 1946.⁷⁵ The protest even featured in the British national press.⁷⁶ However, such demonstrations were not restricted to Kiel but a common feature in all three Western occupation zones.⁷⁷ Criticism of demolition plans also existed within Britain. After a visit to Kiel and other cities in the British occupation zone in August 1946, the economist William Beveridge (instrumental in 1933 in founding the Academic Assistance Council to support intellectuals fleeing Nazism, and the author of the ‘Beveridge Report’ that would later form the basis for the launch of the National Health Service) called for a major shift ‘from punishment to reformation’ in the British government’s approach to dealing with (West) Germany.⁷⁸

Given Gayk’s popularity and close personal relationship with SPD leader Kurt Schumacher, he also assumed a senior position in the party at the state level in Schleswig-Holstein.⁷⁹ Gayk’s active role in the SPD had an effect on the Society of Friends of Coventry and brought a democratic socialist element into the group’s urban internationalism. For example, Schumacher ‘cordially welcomed’ its formation and hoped that its members were ‘inspired by a will towards an international socialism which has its source in humanity’.⁸⁰ And, what is more, Kiel City Council, including many SPD members, officially joined the group, initially paying an annual membership fee of 5,000 Reichsmark and also providing physical space to the society in the city hall’s cellar.⁸¹ Apart from Gayk, who acted as

Gehalten in der Außerordentlichen Sitzung der Kieler Stadtvertretung am 24., 25. und 26. März 1947 (Kiel, 1947), 3-16.

⁷⁵ KCA, Hauptamt, PII/66-09, ‘Niederschrift über die Festsitzung der Stadtvertretung anlässlich der Herbstwoche “Kiel im Aufbau” am Dienstag, 16. September 1947’; KCA, Hauptamt, PII/68-06, ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung der Stadtvertretung anlässlich der “Kieler Woche” am 23. Juni 1949’, 6; ‘Kiel vor der Katastrophe?’, *Kieler Nachrichten*, 12 Jun. 1946, 1; H. Grieser, *Reichsbesitz, Entmilitarisierung und Friedensindustrie in Kiel nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Kiel, 1979); Martens, ‘Zur Rolle von Andreas Gayk’, 245-48, 253-62; F. Graham-Dixon, *The Allied Occupation of Germany: The Refugee Crisis, Denazification and the Path to Reconstruction* (London, 2013), 201, 205-206.

⁷⁶ ‘Protests in Kiel’, *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1948, 4; ‘German Resentment at Naval Demolition’, *The Times*, 9 Dec. 1948, 3; ‘German Torpedo Station’, *The Times*, 11 Dec. 1948, 3.

⁷⁷ P. Gassert, *Bewegte Gesellschaft: Deutsche Protestgeschichte seit 1945* (Stuttgart, 2018), 43-7.

⁷⁸ W. Beveridge, *An Urgent Message from Germany* (London, [1946]), 20-2.

⁷⁹ H. Martens, *Die Geschichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands in Schleswig-Holstein 1945-1959*, 2 vols (Malente, 1998), II, 329-476; A. Renger, ‘Der Freund Kurt Schumachers’, in Jensen and Rickers (eds.), *Andreas Gayk und seine Zeit*, 91-2.

⁸⁰ ‘What the leader of German socialists Dr. Kurt Schumacher has to say of the “Society of Friends of Coventry”,’ *JSFC*, 1 May 1947, 3.

⁸¹ T. Prawitt, *Kieler Kulturleben in der Trümmerzeit 1945-48* (Kiel, 1986), 103.

chairperson, the fellow SPD member and director of Kiel City Council's press office, Friedrich Wendel, was amongst the seven members of the group's 'Advisory Council'. Like Gayk, Wendel had actively opposed the Nationalist Socialist dictatorship. In addition, the latter served as editor of the weekly paper *Der wahre Jacob* (The True Jacob) and published several books of caricatures.⁸² Transnationally, Gayk and Wendel also attempted to promote the cause of the Society of Friends of Coventry through the Labour Party, the SPD's British sister party. Above all, they liaised with Richard Crossman, the Labour MP for Coventry East, who in wartime was involved producing propaganda for occupied Europe with the Political Warfare Executive and who was subsequently an important figure in the party at the all-British level.⁸³

If Gayk played a pivotal role in the formation of the Society of Friends of Coventry, it was the British Branch Officer for Building in Kiel and Coventry native, Gwilym Williams, who had inspired him to make first proposals for a twinning of Coventry and Kiel. In a programmatic essay entitled 'Message to Coventry', which was first published in the local Kiel press in early January 1947, the Kiel lord mayor cited a personal encounter with Williams, as his chief inspiration to forge links between his and Williams' hometowns. What moved Gayk in particular was that Williams 'from the first moment did everything within his power to help a town which had shared the fate of his native town, and to alleviate the distress which he had known from his own experience'.⁸⁴ Williams then passed a copy of Gayk's 'Message to Coventry' on to Lord Mayor George Briggs, who backed the internationalist ideas proposed by his German colleague, including the formation of the Society of Friends of Coventry.⁸⁵

In April 1947, the Society of Friends of Coventry officially formed at a constituent assembly.⁸⁶ The inaugural meeting was organized in close collaboration with representatives of the British military

⁸² 'Advisory Council of the Society', *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 16. F. Wendel's work on caricatures included the books *Der Sozialismus in der Karikatur: Von Marx bis Macdonald. Ein Stück Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin, 1924) and *Wilhelm II. in der Karikatur* (Dresden, 1928).

⁸³ KCA, 52909, Wendel to Healy, 26 Feb. 1947; Wendel to Healy, 29 May 1947; Labour Party to Wendel, 16 Jun. 1947; N. Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry 1945-60* (London, 1990); T. S. Thornton, *Richard Crossman and the Welfare State: Pioneer of Welfare Provision and Labour Politics in Post-War Britain* (London, 2009).

⁸⁴ A. Gayk, 'Message to Coventry', reprinted in, *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 8.

⁸⁵ KCA, 33672, Briggs to Gayk, 18 Jan. 1947; KCA, 52909, Kuchel to Briggs, 20 Jan. 1947; Briggs to Kuchel, 26 Feb. 1946. Gayk's and Briggs' letters were reprinted in the *JSFC*, along with responses from the German public: Gayk, 'Message to Coventry', 8; G. Briggs, 'Message from Coventry', 9; 'The "Message to Coventry" and its echo in German letters', 9-12, all in *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947).

⁸⁶ KCA, 33672, F. Wendel, 'Constituent meeting of the Society of Friends of Coventry', 20 Mar. 1947; "Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys": Feierlicher Gründungsakt im Kieler Gewerkschaftshaus', *Kieler Nachrichten*, 3 Apr. 1947; KCA, 52909, 'Constituent Assembly of the Society of Friends of Coventry', n.d.

government who were sympathetic towards the society's aims and objectives.⁸⁷ Amongst the 1,200 invitees was Lord Mayor George Briggs of Coventry, who was unable to attend the meeting.⁸⁸ In the end, some 'one thousand persons from all classes of the population attended', as the *Journal of the Society of Friends of Coventry* reported, adding: 'There were present also representatives of the Government of Land Schleswig-Holstein, of the Municipal Administration, of the University and the Schools of Kiel, of the Political Parties and the Trade Union, of commerce and industry, of the clergy, and of youth associations.' Plus, key members of the British occupying forces such as the Deputy Regional Commissioner or the Regional Governmental Officer attended the meeting.⁸⁹ Membership of the society's 'Advisory Council' reflected the group's connections with the higher echelons of Kiel's society: besides Gayk and Wendel, the other members included the former Lord Mayor Koch, now publisher of the influential local newspaper *Kieler Nachrichten*, Professor Wilhelm Hallermann, director of Kiel University's institute for forensic medicine, and the theatre critic Alexander Kus.⁹⁰ The logo of the Society of Friends of Coventry featured a cogwheel with the Latin word 'PAX' (peace) in single capitals superimposed on the cogwheel in a triangular shape. At the centre of the cogwheel were stylized grains.⁹¹ Through its symbolism the logo contributed to mediating the notion of 'socialist internationalism'. Apart from Kurt Schumacher, the voluntary friendship society received prominent endorsement from the Kiel-born theoretical physicist, pioneer of quantum mechanics and Nobel laureate Max Planck.⁹² At irregular intervals, the group published a bilingual *Journal of the Society of Friends of Coventry* (*Mitteilungen der 'Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys'*) in German and English.⁹³

Anyone over the age of 18 could join the Society of Friends of Coventry, provided that they held citizenship and accepted the group's statutes. In addition, two referees and a special committee had to attest to applicants' 'correct attitude towards peace and democratic reliability'. The society's chief decision-making body was its annual general meeting. An executive committee ran the group's day-to-day business and was assisted by an advisory council of 15 members.⁹⁴ At its constituting

⁸⁷ KCA, 33672, Wendel to Mills, 20 Mar. 1947; Kreis Kiel Resident Officer to Wendel, 26 Mar. 1947; KCA, 52909, Needham to Gayk, 1 Feb. 1947; Wendel to Hawlett, 14 Mar. 1947; Wendel to Cowie, 20 Mar. 1947.

⁸⁸ KCA, 33672, Untitled note, n.d.; KCA, 52909, Wendel to Briggs, 17 Mar. 1947.

⁸⁹ 'Foundation of the Society of Friends of Coventry', *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 1-7 (1-2).

⁹⁰ 'Advisory council of the society', *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 16.

⁹¹ Head of Front Page, *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 1.

⁹² 'Prof. Dr. Max Planck and the Society of Friends of Coventry', 1; 'What the leader of the German socialists Dr. Kurt Schumacher has to say of the "Society of Friends of Coventry"', 3, all in *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947).

⁹³ Untitled section under the journal's flag, *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947), 1. In total, the society published four issues of the journal at irregular intervals. It ceased publication in May 1949.

⁹⁴ KCA, 33672, 'Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys'.

meeting, Gayk was elected president of the Society.⁹⁵ In spite of its supposedly apolitical agenda, a large number of senior city council officials and other influential citizens of Kiel such as academics from the Christian-Albrechts University, senior representatives from trade unions and local industry or banking held key positions in the group.⁹⁶ Plus, the Economic Association of Building Industries, District Nordmark, Land Schleswig-Holstein, supported its work for reconciliation.⁹⁷ Thus, the programmatic line drawn between the political and the apolitical by Gayk was in actuality fine and ambiguous.⁹⁸

Under its internationalist remit, the aims and objectives of the Society of Friends of Coventry included ‘an extensive exchange of correspondence’ between people from Kiel and Coventry. In addition, the group sought to set up exchange programmes, especially for youths, promote peace education and share knowledge about urban reconstruction as well as propagate liberalism in global trade to create peaceful relations between nations.⁹⁹ For example, it helped people from Kiel and Coventry to become pen pals and featured articles on the histories, sights and personalities from the two cities in its journal.¹⁰⁰ But the group also advocated international understanding beyond Kiel and Coventry. In this, the society drew inspiration from the UN Association, the National Council of Women or the National Peace Council.¹⁰¹ Moreover, its officers liaised with foreign organizations such as the Union of Democratic Control in Britain or the Labor League for Human Rights in the United

⁹⁵ KCA, 33672, “‘Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys’”: Feierlicher Gründungsakt im Kieler Gewerkschaftshaus’, *Kieler Nachrichten*, 3 Apr. 1947.

⁹⁶ KCA, 33672, untitled list of officers of the Society of Friends of Coventry, n.d.

⁹⁷ KCA, 52909, Ohle and Thierbach to Gayk, 6 Jan. 1947.

⁹⁸ This is a common tension in town twinning: S. Dörfler, ‘Städtepartnerschaften als “ideologiefreie Zonen”?’ Historische und politische Störfaktoren in der Gründungsphase und im Alltag von Städtepartnerschaften’, in Defrance, Herrmann and Nordblom (ed.), *Städtepartnerschaften*, 58-69.

⁹⁹ ‘Statutes of the Society of Friends of Coventry’, *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947), 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ KCA, 52909, Wendel to Briggs, 28 Nov. 1947, attached: Society of Friends of Coventry, ‘List One: Correspondence with British friends is desired’, 1 Nov. 1947; and Society of Friends of Coventry, ‘Members seeking correspondence: List two’, Dec. 1947; Briggs to Wendel, 11 Dec. 1947; ‘British visit to Kiel’, n.d.; Press Office, City of Kiel, to the Editor of the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 31 Jan. 1947; Wendel to Turner, 15 May 1947. The group continued to liaise with city council officials in Coventry over those matters, Wendel to Briggs, Oct. 1947. ‘Outline of the history of the town of Coventry’, 12-13; ‘Outline of the history of the town of Kiel’, 13-14; ‘The legend of Lady Godiva’, 15, all in, *JSFC*, 1 (1 May 1947); ‘Famous personalities of Coventry’, unpaginated; H. Jacobsen, ‘The botanical garden of Kiel’, unpaginated, all in, *JSFC*, 4 (1 May 1949).

¹⁰¹ KCA, 52909, Wendel to the National and International Council of Women, Oct. 1947; Wendel to UN Association, Coventry chapter, Oct. 1947; Wendel to National Peace Council, 29 May 1947; ‘Two letters of friendship’, 2; ‘In the service of securing international peace’, 3-4, all in, *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947).

States.¹⁰² As part of its commitment to internationalism (and crucially its public demonstration of that commitment), the Society of Friends of Coventry reprinted the ‘Declaration of Human Rights’, which the UN General Assembly passed on 10 December 1948 on the cover of its journal’s May 1949 issue.¹⁰³ In this context, the group also called for gender equality and underlined the contributions by female politicians to internationalism.¹⁰⁴ The internationalist outlook and orientation of the Society of Friends of Coventry – unequivocally a social democratic ethos, given its progressiveness and egalitarianism – exemplifies Glenda Sluga’s observation that the immediate aftermath of the Second World War marked ‘the apogee of twentieth-century internationalism’.¹⁰⁵

Peace-building, ‘world citizenship’ and the role of cities in promoting ‘internationality’

The Society of Friends of Coventry engaged with a multifaceted urban internationalism by addressing a distinct set of issues pertaining to cities as hubs of peace-building and promoting ‘internationality’ and ‘world citizenship’. In his speech at the constituent meeting in April 1947, Willi Koch pointed to the recent atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 to stress the urgent need for the work of the Society of Friends of Coventry. “‘Into the hands of us humans the decision has been placed whether our Earth is to be the bearer, in future, of life and happiness, or whether this planet is to describe its orbit through the aeons, empty and dead and laden with the vestiges of crime”,’ he warned.¹⁰⁶ Koch’s dire warning echoed more widely held concerns over the atom bomb in early postwar Germany and the shadow it cast over the future of humanity.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, Koch’s justification of the need for the reconciliatory work of the Society of Friends of Coventry also tapped a contemporary internationalist discourse that had emerged in the United States shortly after the Second World War: in response to the experience of two world wars and the recent use of atomic arms against two Japanese cities, a number of nuclear scientists, most of whom had been involved in the development of the first atomic bombs during the Second World War, promoted the idea of a world government to avoid another global conflict that was likely to be fought

¹⁰² KCA, 52909, Wendel to Union of Democratic Control, 29 May 1947; Wendel to Labor League for Human Rights, 29 May 1947; ‘Jetzt ist es Zeit beim Aufbau des Friedens zu helfen!’, n.d.

¹⁰³ ‘Declaration of human rights’, *JSFC*, 4 (1 May 1949), unpaginated.

¹⁰⁴ ‘The woman’s voice’, *JSFC*, 4 (1 May 1949), unpaginated.

¹⁰⁵ Sluga, *Internationalism*, 79.

¹⁰⁶ Koch cited in ‘Foundation of the Society of Friends of Coventry’, 2.

¹⁰⁷ I. Stölken-Fitschen, *Atombombe und Geistesgeschichte: Eine Studie der fünfziger Jahre aus deutscher Sicht* (Baden-Baden, 1995), 22-30; H. Nehring, *Politics of Security: British and West German Protest Movements and the Early Cold War, 1945-1970* (Oxford, 2013), 18-23.

with nuclear weaponry.¹⁰⁸ As a step towards creating a world government, the Society of Friends of Coventry supported the idea of ‘world citizenship’, which gained currency in the immediate postwar period. Against widespread distrust in political elites, it was down to ‘ordinary citizens’ to create a world government.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, Friedrich Wendel argued that ‘the national principle’ was arbitrary and temporary and would eventually give way to the superior ‘principle of internationality’. In Wendel’s eyes, this was due to the fact that ‘[t]he sole purpose that a nation state has to serve in these circumstances is the naturalization of its citizens into an international community’.¹¹⁰ While the bottom-up approach to world citizenship found expression in the Society of Friends of Coventry’s vow not to meddle in high politics, the fact that Gayk, Wendel or Koch held in fact political offices made the group’s approach seem somewhat ambivalent.¹¹¹

Apart from a world government and citizenship, the group advocated free trade and European integration as antidotes to what it perceived of as the threat of nationalism. A fair and peaceful world economic system formed an integral part of its urban internationalism.¹¹² Such notions were based on the principles of the Bretton Woods Agreement that sought to establish a fairer global economic system in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.¹¹³ In an article on ‘World Peace and World Economy’ in the *Journal of the Society of Friends of Kiel*, the economist Anton Zottmann of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy elaborated on this programmatic point in October 1947. Zottmann made the liberal case for frictionless global trade, emphasizing that ‘Peace and World-Economy are functionally inter-related’.¹¹⁴

Closely related to its promotion of free trade was the Society of Friends of Coventry’s backing of European integration and cooperation. At its annual general meeting in September 1947, the Heidelberg sociologist Alfred Weber, the younger brother of the famed sociologist Max Weber and a critic of National Socialism, proposed a move towards a “European Federation” as a promising way to prevent war. At the same time, he warned of the Soviet Union engaging in “a dry war” with the

¹⁰⁸ On the United States: D. Masters and K. Way (eds.), *One World or None: A Report to the Public on the Full Meaning of the Atomic Bomb* (New York, 1946); P. Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985; Chapel Hill, 1994), 27-106. On the German reception: Stölken-Fitschen, *Atombombe und Geistesgeschichte*, 54-60.

¹⁰⁹ D. Heater, *World Citizenship and Government: Cosmopolitan Ideas in the History of Western Political Thought* (Basingstoke, 1996), 170-171.

¹¹⁰ F. Wendel, *Die Frage des Friedens: Herder und Kant in ihrem Verhältnis zur nationalstaatlichen Souveränität* (Kiel, 1947), 30.

¹¹¹ Gayk and Koch were also members of the parliament of the state of Schleswig-Holstein (Landtag).

¹¹² KCA, 33672, Gayk, ‘Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys’.

¹¹³ B. Steil, *The Battle of Bretton Woods: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order* (Princeton, 2013).

¹¹⁴ A. Zottmann, ‘World peace and world economy’, *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947), 9-10 (10).

United States and urged that “Europe must be activated” and “abandon its passivity” to ensure that it would not be controlled by either superpower. “Only a free, humanitarian socialism, based on democratic principles and realised as a whole in Europe, can save the continent,” concluded Weber, stressing: “That socialism should not, however, seek salvation in exaggerated planning and nationalisation, but must make humanity the starting point of its deliberations”.¹¹⁵ Weber’s words exemplify early manifestations of a democratization process that occurred across Western Europe during the first two decades or so after 1945 that also led to such institutions as the social market economy and included the European project.¹¹⁶

Alongside setting a programmatic agenda, the Society of Friends of Coventry endorsed channels and fora for disseminating urban internationalism. Education represented a chief conduit for bearing the association’s message and handing it down to future generations. Above all, this included proposals for a chair in politics and international law with a special focus on peace studies at Kiel University.¹¹⁷ What is more, the Society of Friends of Coventry called for the foundation of a special school in ‘which the young generation will be educated in a cosmopolitan spirit of true humanity’.¹¹⁸ If these educational institutions provided main channels for spreading ideas of reconciliation, the annual Kiel Week, an internationally renowned sailing event that had been discontinued during the war, was to become a chief public forum to promote this internationalist spirit of reconciliation. Consequently, the Society of Friends of Coventry advocated the re-launch of the annual Kiel Week.¹¹⁹ The group envisaged Kiel Week ‘to strive to form a live relationship between the rehabilitation of [...] [Kiel] and the cultural and social life of its citizens’.¹²⁰

The September 1947 visit, Kiel Week and public performances of urban internationalism

Various strands of this postwar urban internationalism – religious and secular, socialist and non-political – coalesced during a visit by a delegation from Coventry to Kiel in September 1947. In January 1947, an editorial in the *Kieler Presse* asked the rhetorical question, ‘Is it really so utopian to believe that in the very near future city councillors, politicians, trade-unionists, artists and scientists of Germany and England will be visiting one another? Our ravished world can only be regenerated in a spirit of humanity

¹¹⁵ Weber cited in ‘Criticism of the state and its sovereignty’, *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947), 11-14.

¹¹⁶ M. Conway, *Western Europe’s Democratic Age, 1945-1968* (Princeton, 2020).

¹¹⁷ KCA, 33672, Gayk, ‘Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys’.

¹¹⁸ ‘Statutes of the Society of Friends of Coventry’, 6.

¹¹⁹ KCA, 33672, A. Gayk, ‘Die Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventrys: Völkerverständigung von Stadt zu Stadt. Der Informationsbrief, Teil A – Abschnitt I. Thema 5: Städte und Kreise, Beitrag 3 vom 2.5. 1947’.

¹²⁰ ‘Statutes of the Society of Friends of Coventry’, 6.

and peace'.¹²¹ Later that year and central to the formation of closer ties between the two cities, a visit to Kiel by just such a delegation from Coventry took place. The Society of Friends of Coventry had invited Lord Mayor George Briggs and other members of the Association of Friends of Kiel, along with other city officials and representatives from the trades council and clergy, notably Provost Richard Howard and Secretary of the Coventry Trades Union Council Wilfred Spencer, to attend the 1947 Kiel Week that focused on the theme of 'Rebuilding Kiel'.¹²² The Society of Friends of Coventry and its English sister organization, the Association of the Friends of Kiel, shared a pacifist outlook, 'reject[ing] war as a means of policy'. Amongst other things, this manifested itself in their support for Albert Einstein's proposals for a general strike by atomic scientists to push politicians to pledge not to use nuclear weapons. 'The two sister associations proclaim the necessity of an understanding between man and man', reported the *Journal of the Society of Friends of Coventry* in autumn 1947, that 'will start with an exchange of letters and mutual visits and will end in a friendship which thrives on internationalism and has nothing to expect from nationalism except the interest taken in foreign languages'. The article added: 'While abroad, we should like to move about really without let or hindrance!'¹²³ In recognition of their service to promoting reconciliation between the two cities, all members of the delegation from Coventry received the status of honorary members of the Society of Friends of Coventry.¹²⁴

Although some of the most enduring images of the 1947 visit related perhaps to the presentation of the 'Cross of Coventry' by Provost Howard to members of Kiel's clergy, the involvement of religious representatives was not a forgone conclusion. As late as 5 August 1947, Provost Howard received a letter expressing concern about the church's involvement in building bridges between the two communities; Richard Gutteridge (who had been lecturing to theological students at Kiel University) wrote that, 'I hear with the greatest interest of the proposed link between Coventry and Kiel, and had quite a long conversation on that subject with the Oberbürgermeister. My feeling is that there are great possibilities in the proposal, particularly as it has originally come from the German side. I was rather disturbed, however, to find that the church did not appear to figure in the original suggestion'.¹²⁵ Ultimately, the delegation's visit featured a range of events that were at least as important for improving

¹²¹ Cited in W. E. Rose, *Sent from Coventry: A Mission of International Reconciliation* (London, 1980), 14.

¹²² 'Snapshots of the Kiel September Week', 15; KCA, 52909, Wendel to Briggs, 12 May 1947; Briggs to Gayk, 12 Aug. 1947; Briggs to Thompson, 1 Sep. 1947; 'Festival on the Fjord'; KCA, Hauptamt, PII/66-09, 'Niederschrift über die Festsitzung der Stadtvertretung anlässlich der Herbstwoche "Kiel im Aufbau" am Dienstag, 16. September 1947'. Spencer was later Lord Mayor of Coventry in 1972.

¹²³ 'A visit from Coventry' *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947), 5.

¹²⁴ KCA, 52909, Managing Committee and the Council of the Society of Friends of Coventry, 'The Honorary Membership of the Society of Friends of Coventry', 22 Sept. 1947.

¹²⁵ Coventry Cathedral Archive (CCA), PA2506/25/2/11, Gutteridge to Howard, 5 Aug. 1947.

relations between the two former foes as the exchange of the Cross of Nails, and which highlight the multifaceted nature of urban internationalism as exemplified by the Kiel-Coventry association. According to a diary kept during the visit by Howard, it lasted from 14 to 21 September with a programme of meetings, events and tours laid on by the hosts. Starting with a ceremony of remembrance at the town hall and the laying of wreaths at the British Cemetery on the Monday morning, urban space and acts of commemoration were central to the performance of reconciliation that this landmark visit instantiated. The visitors met with representatives of various Christian denominations to discuss reconstruction (including reflections on the churches' role, although this was apparently beyond the capabilities of Howard's interpreter).¹²⁶

It was at this meeting on the first day of the visit – during which Howard spoke of the 'primary importance' of the church to the nascent twinning initiative – that the Provost gifted a Cross of Nails. In his diary he recalled explaining its provenance and how it was made before gifting it to Propst Johannes Lorentzen of St Nikolai, 'for his church as a symbol of divine forgiveness and of our mutual joyousness, and of God's power through the death and resurrection of Christ to turn all our sin and tragedy into good'. In turn, on the Friday, Howard visited St Nikolai with Propst Lorentzen and witnessed the uncleared rubble in the bombed building. The German clergyman returned the gesture to his British counterpart: 'He gave us a piece of stone from the church to place in the Chapel of Unity'.¹²⁷ As early as August 1945, Lorentzen had envisaged the church taking up the role of serving as 'advocate of the people' (*Anwalt des Volkes*).¹²⁸ Thus, this exchange with Howard was not simply gift-giving by two religious leaders, but rather a transnational gesture of reconciliation and peace-building between urban communities centred on architectural relics from their respective war-devastated buildings.

The visiting delegation were also given numerous tours of displaced persons camps (where Howard was struck by the poor conditions of the huts housing 500 inmates), of Kiel harbour (during which Gayk and Howard discussed how 'the Churches might become more democratic and proactively Christian' and how the new association might work to bring religious representatives and the working classes 'closer') and of course of the ruined city itself (prompting Howard to remark on how, 'The desolation everywhere is momentous, the destruction complete [...] like the centre of Coventry extended everywhere').¹²⁹ They partook in a service with university students and theology Professor Heinrich Rendtorff, as well as attending concerts and a reception hosted by Mayor Koch. Furthermore, Spencer, Briggs and Howard were guests of honour at a special meeting of the Kiel City Council which included the 'distribution of certificates for merit in removal of rubble'. Speeches by Briggs and Gayk

¹²⁶ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, R.T. Howard, handwritten diary of visit to Kiel (14-21 Sept. 1947).

¹²⁷ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary.

¹²⁸ K. Jürgensen, *Die Stunde der Kirche: Die Ev.-Luth. Landeskirche Schleswig-Holsteins in den ersten Jahren nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Neumünster, 1976), 167.

¹²⁹ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary.

at the council meeting, alongside the military governor of Schleswig-Holstein, Vice-Air Marshall Hugh Vivian Champion de Crespigny, generated further publicity including photographic coverage.¹³⁰ Public interest was also evident from the 800 members who attended the ‘Festival of Friends of Coventry’ on 18 September.¹³¹

Howard, Briggs and Gayk also attended the launch of an exhibition on Kiel’s reconstruction, ‘Destruction – Clearing – Rebuilding’, at the Kiel town hall. The exhibition contrasted Kiel before and after the destruction, as well as laying out principles of town planning for the city’s rebuilding. That the exposition included a section entitled “‘Kiel – Coventry, Two Towns, One Fate’” stressed once again the bond between the two cities in the face of their shared experience of aerial bombardment.¹³² It also, as Howard noted in his diary, included comparative photographs of St Nikolai and Coventry Cathedral, underscoring the centrality of urban space – and crucially cultural representations concerning its postwar reconstruction – in the orchestrated work of reconciliation and international relations.¹³³

Alongside symbolic and public relations events, both sides engaged in discussing practical matters around the reconstruction of their cities and how they could deepen their relationship. In line with the theme of the 1947 Kiel Week, Mayor Briggs shared plans for the urban reconstruction of Coventry with Gayk and members of Kiel City Council, for example. During a trip onboard a steamer in Kiel Bay, members of the Society of Friends of Coventry and the Association of Friends of Kiel discussed possible ways to improve their cooperation. Since the two delegations spent most of the time under deck, the *Journal of the Society of Friends of Coventry* quipped ‘[t]he Bay of Kiel did not mind’, commenting on the constructive atmosphere that ‘the busy interpreter was not to be envied – he first took off his jacket’.¹³⁴ The final choreographed activity of the visit was a trip to the top of the Rathaus tower for a view over the city, and the local *Die Brücke* cultural institute in which German citizens could come to learn more about Britons and the British way of life.¹³⁵ The Kiel branch of *Die Brücke*, which opened in 1946, was one of 50 such institutions that the British military government set up in its

¹³⁰ ‘Two cities’, 1; ‘Pictures: September Week “Kiel Rebuilding”’, 16, all in, *JSFC*, 2 (15 Oct. 1947). Howard also met personally with Regional Governor de Crespigny who claimed to be ‘very interested’ in the delegation’s visit and thought that the ‘spiritual and cultural friendship’ fostered by the society ‘might do much good’ (CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary).

¹³¹ Curiously, Howard does not seem to have attended a talk given by Lord Pakenham, Minister for Germany, at Kiel University on 19 Sept. 1947 on the subject of ‘Christianity and Politics’ in which the Minister characterised the role of Britons as trustees in the occupation and spoke of being ‘all members of the same family’ not of one nation or another. The lecture is mentioned by Graham-Dixon (“‘Moral Mandate’”, 205), but is not referred to in Howard’s diary.

¹³² ‘Pictures’, 16.

¹³³ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary.

¹³⁴ ‘Snapshots of the Kiel September Week’, 15.

¹³⁵ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary.

occupation zone from 1946 to 1949.¹³⁶ Thus, this visit – and the witnessing of the visit in situ and in mediated form – were vital performances of postwar intent and peace-building efforts. Moreover, they were staged in public spaces in an effort to help create new public discourses – the urban setting, the symbolism of the postwar townscape and the image of the city in coverage of these public performances of reconciliation was instrumental, not incidental.¹³⁷

Implying how the 1947 visit was at least in part staged for its image, Howard recalled in his diary the familiar invocation, ‘Gentleman, please smile. Your photograph is being taken’. However, regional tensions owing to the implementation of the de-industrialisation policy and the subsequent loss of jobs in the British zone meant that the 1947 visit was ‘nearly cancelled’, according to Howard. The previous year, on behalf of all Kiel church leaders, Lorentzen had backed a petition by the state government of Schleswig-Holstein (*Landtag*) calling on the British military government to abandon its plans to dismantle local industrial plants to secure employment for the war-struck population of Kiel. More recently Howard’s chaperon, Group Captain Thompson, implied that Gayk had nearly been arrested over his opposition to the policy. It seems both British occupiers and Kiel dignitaries hoped to regain equilibrium between German citizens and British forces as a result of the September visit. Indeed, during his final meeting with Provost Howard, Group Captain Thompson had even asked if the delegation might be in a position to ‘counterbalance’ some of the negative press coverage of the occupation in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, perhaps approaching the BBC or at least the Coventry press to convey an alternative view on the work of the CCG.¹³⁸

The 1947 visit had played a crucial role in laying down key foundations of the twinning arrangement. After the first postwar Kiel Week in September 1947, the annual event was held in June

¹³⁶ Initially, *Die Brücke* institutes were called British Information Centres. K. Jürgensen, *Die Briten in Schleswig-Holstein 1945-1949* (Neumünster, 1989), 149; Prawitt, *Kieler Kulturleben*, 102-3.

¹³⁷ Numerous publications produced in Coventry made use of photographs of the key symbols associated with the site and of the ruins to visualise and promote Coventry’s approach to the challenge of fostering peace and reconciliation in the postwar/Cold War moment, including photographs of the ‘Kiel stone of forgiveness’ from St Nikolai’s gifted to Howard in September 1947. See, for example, a collection titled ‘Coventry Cathedral Pamphlets’ addressing topics such as ‘Christian Unity,’ as well as ‘The Nations and Peace’ produced c.1948 (Basil Spence Archive, Royal Commission for the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, Items 156–159; MS 2329/ENG/9/9/6/154–169).

¹³⁸ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary. Graham-Dixon has asserted that tacit British official support for ‘initiatives to establish links with Britain, for example between Kiel and Coventry in 1947, succeeded not only in fostering long-term Anglo-German links and friendships, but in pacifying much of the public’s distaste about the plight of the refugees reported in the British press and so vehemently brought into the public domain by [Bishop] Bell, [Victor] Gollancz and others [such as Richard Stokes, MP]’ (Graham-Dixon, “‘Moral Mandate’,” 209).

from 1948 on.¹³⁹ Representatives from Coventry also attended the subsequent two Kiel Weeks. The motto of the 1948 Kiel Week – ‘For International Understanding and Friendship among Nations’ – echoed the key objectives of the Society of Friends of Coventry.¹⁴⁰ While a growing number of Scandinavian delegates participated in this event, the *Journal of the Society of Friends of Coventry* stressed: ‘It was but natural that the list of the guests of the Town of Kiel from abroad was headed by representatives of the City of Coventry’.¹⁴¹ Alongside Gayk and the heads of the foreign delegations, including Briggs’ successor as Lord Mayor of Coventry, William Hodgson Malcolm, the Deputy Regional Commissioner de Havilland addressed a special session of Kiel City Council to mark the opening of Kiel Week.¹⁴² Cultural and social events took up an important part of the 1948 Kiel Week. These included an exhibition entitled “‘Kiel-Readjusting-Itself’” that focused on the de-militarization of the local economy from war-time to peace-time products such as radios or medical instrumentation.¹⁴³

Conclusion

On 18 January 1947 ahead of the first delegation visit, Coventry’s Lord Mayor George Briggs wrote to Kiel’s Lord Mayor Andreas Gayk expressing his ‘hope that from the ruins of our respective cities there will emerge something finer than we ever dreamed of in the past. Not only nobler cities but nobler citizens. The reconstruction should begin with ourselves’.¹⁴⁴ The 1949 Kiel Week continued in this spirit.¹⁴⁵ A delegation from Coventry headed by the former Lord Mayor Briggs attended the event. By this time, the FRG had been founded and started to re-establish relations with the United Kingdom at the state level. This did not stop Gayk from issuing another warning against the perils of nationalism. He was concerned that Germany and other nations only experienced ‘a respite from nationalism’. Gayk added: ‘If we manage to use this respite for a democratic reconstruction, the sun of peace will also shine

¹³⁹ J. Danker, *Die Kieler Woche im Wandel: Die Neugründung der Kieler Woche nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Kiel, 1990).

¹⁴⁰ ‘Kiel Week 1948: For International Understanding and Friendship among Nations’, *JSFC*, 3 (15 Oct. 1948), unpaginated cover page.

¹⁴¹ ‘Glimpse of “Kiel-Readjusting-Itself”-Exhibition’, unpaginated; ‘Kiel Honouring the Memory of the Danish Poet Jens Baggesen, Friend of Friedrich Schiller’, unpaginated; A. Överland, untitled excerpt from speech, unpaginated, all in, *JSFC*, 3 (15 Oct. 1948).

¹⁴² ‘Festive Sitting of Kiel Town Council’, *JSFC*, 3 (15 Oct. 1948), unpaginated.

¹⁴³ ‘Glimpse of “Kiel-Readjusting-Itself”-Exhibition’; P. Jeschke, ‘Aus Trümmern wurde die Landeshauptstadt: Kiel 1945-1950’, in C. Geckeler (ed.), *Erinnerungen der Kieler Kriegsgeneration 1930/1960* (Husum, 2003), 192-8 (197).

¹⁴⁴ The letter was reprinted as: Briggs, ‘Message from Coventry’, 9.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Kiel Week 1949’, *JSFC*, 4 (1 May 1949), unpaginated.

on this tormented continent.’ At the same time, Gayk acknowledged in his speech the realities of the Cold War, conceding ‘that the big political decisions for a democratic Germany are made in the West’. This meant that ‘reconciliation with our Western neighbours is [...] the most important prerequisite for European reconstruction’.¹⁴⁶

If the Society of Friends of Coventry backed early proposals for European integration and cooperation, some of its members viewed the emerging Cold War as a threat to their particular internationalist vision. ‘Europe is in danger of losing not only the war, but the peace as well,’ warned Gayk at the group’s inaugural meeting against the divisive effect that the struggle between the two superpowers, in particular as a result of Soviet intentions, might have on Europe, demoting the continent ‘to the rôle of a mere satellite of the Great Powers of America and Russia’. And this was where, in his view, town twinning initiatives such as the one between Coventry and Kiel came in – to bridge growing divisions.¹⁴⁷ The society continued to be critical of the emerging bi-polar world order of the Cold War that was, in its eyes, counter-productive to its ideals of international understanding and reconciliation.¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, with the formal division of Germany, ‘Cold War internationalism’ came to play a more dominant role within the urban internationalism of the first postwar years, being (as Sandrine Kott argues) marked by ‘rival universalisms’ rooted in two opposing ideologies.¹⁴⁹ Each claimed and promoted worldwide validity – a fact reflected in tension, paradox and controversy in many postwar internationalist projects. In the relationship between Coventry and Kiel, for instance, Coventry’s simultaneous twinship with Dresden later brought the difficult relations between the two German states into this British-West German reconciliation project.¹⁵⁰

Arguably, there was an imbalance in the Kiel-Coventry reconciliation initiative from the outset. In his diary from the 1947 visit, Howard expressed the reservations of Britons both at home and taking part in the occupation: ‘Among ourselves and the CCG there was much discussion about all this. [...] They seem to expect us to treat them as though they had always been oppressed by it [the Hitler regime] and were victims of it’. For their part, Howard noted, Kiel citizens often seemed ‘overshadowed with the sense of the destruction that has engulfed their city’, unable to talk of much else and even framing their resistance to the occupation in terms of bricks and mortar of the city: ‘They resent the materials, especially cement, spent on British airfields, which had been broken up after the capitulation but some of which are now being restored. The cement could be used for building’.¹⁵¹ As the British Council

¹⁴⁶ KCA, Hauptamt, PII/68-06, ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung der Stadtvertretung anlässlich der “Kieler Woche” am 23. Juni 1949’, 2, 4-5.

¹⁴⁷ Gayk cited in ‘Foundation of the Society of Friends of Coventry’, 3-6.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Political World Affairs’, *JSFC*, 4 (1 May 1949), unpaginated.

¹⁴⁹ Kott, ‘Cold War Internationalism’, 340-62.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, CCA, PA2506/7/2/30, Lohmeyer to Williams, 18 Feb. 1965.

¹⁵¹ CCA, PA2506/25/2/11, Howard diary.

reported in 1949 on this new era of town twinning initiatives, ‘it has in certain instances been found that towns in the UK have been much less enthusiastic about the idea than towns overseas’¹⁵² The greater commitment by urban elites in Kiel perhaps tracked the unequal power relations of the years of occupation.

Despite its pivotal role in promoting urban internationalism in the immediate postwar period, the Society of Friends of Coventry was short-lived and disbanded in 1955 owing to dwindling membership numbers.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, it earned a posthumous achievement the following year when Kiel University fulfilled one of the group’s aims by creating a chair in peace studies.¹⁵⁴ In the absence of the Society of Friends of Coventry, Kiel City Council, like its English counterpart, was in charge of co-ordinating twinning activities between the two municipalities. By 1967, Coventry and Kiel City Councils finally signed a formal town twinning agreement.¹⁵⁵ If as early as 1947 the emerging ‘Cold War internationalism’ had already left a mark on urban internationalism, through the 1960s the FRG’s official policies on European integration and Franco-(West) German rapprochement, especially the Élysée Treaty (1963), further influenced its evolution.¹⁵⁶ From the 1970s, in the context of Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*, Kiel started to engage in closer relations with cities in Eastern bloc countries, leading to formal twinning agreements with Gdynia (Poland, 1985), Tallinn (Estonia, 1986), Stralsund (East Germany, 1987) and Kaliningrad and Sovetsk (both in Russia, 1992).¹⁵⁷ By contrast, as a result of the global economic crisis of the early 1970s Coventry City Council started to prioritize economic ties and promote the English city as a tourist destination, leading to new links with North American towns including Coventry, Rhode Island (1971); Coventry, New York (1972); and Cornwall, Ontario (1972). Coventry City Council’s shift in selection criteria for twin cities away from its primary focus on its image as ‘Peace City’ towards building economic links was exemplified by the council’s renaming of its International Friendship Committee in 1972, becoming the Civic and International

¹⁵² Cited by Clarke, ‘Town-twinning in Cold-War Britain’, 178.

¹⁵³ KCA, 35176, F. Wendel, ‘Einladung zur Jahreshauptversammlung’, n.d.; E. Paul et al., ‘Protokoll der Hauptversammlung der Gesellschaft der Freunde Coventry im Park Hotel am 10. Februar 1955, 20 Uhr’, 10 Feb. 1955; Hallermann to Adolph, 11 Feb. 1955.

¹⁵⁴ B. Meinschien, ‘Michael Freund und der Aufbau der Kieler Politikwissenschaft – Forschung zu “einem zwielfichtigen Raum”,’ in Christoph Cornelißen (ed.), *Wissenschaft im Aufbruch: Beiträge zur Wiederbegründung der Kieler Universität nach 1945* (Essen, 2014), 55-81 (pp. 57-59).

¹⁵⁵ Grieser, ‘Wiederaufstieg aus Trümmern’, 455.

¹⁵⁶ Bautz, ‘Die Auslandsbeziehungen der deutschen Kommunen’, 34.

¹⁵⁷ T. Erlenbusch, ‘Die neue kommunale “Außenpolitik”,’ in R. Fischer, *Kiel & die 70er: Günther Bantzer und der Beginn unserer Gegenwart* (Kiel, 2020), 155-74; ‘Kiel international im Überblick’, available at https://www.kiel.de/de/kiel_zukunft/kiel_international/index.php accessed 12 Jan. 2023.

Relations Committee.¹⁵⁸ And, if it seemed that the early ethos and aims of urban internationalism had changed fundamentally in the late twentieth century, the Russian attack on Ukraine from February 2022 has shattered the foundations of Coventry's town twinning network, prompting the city council to suspend its links with Volgograd, the subject of the city's first twinning partnership.¹⁵⁹

The vital case study of the Coventry-Kiel link highlights the crucial importance of urban internationalism and the mediated symbolism of the postwar city – of the power of public performances, images, publications, ceremonies, events and exchanged gifts relating to the experience of urban destruction in wartime. As Mangion has argued, the 1940s entailed reconfiguration of existing initiatives towards religious internationalism leading to 'transnational exchanges' emphasising 'a culture of "communication and encounter"' and the same can be claimed of secular and socialist internationalisms.¹⁶⁰ To grasp the significance of town twinning in the postwar moment it is essential to grasp how internationalism was communicated and encountered, and indeed how diverse strands of internationalist thinking and effort were intertwined. Processes of representation and presentation – of gifting and receiving architectural artefacts, of ceremony and performance in urban space, of showing and seeing – were central to making the Society of the Friends of Coventry meaningful and affective. Likewise, through its physical circulation and visual reproduction, the Cross of Nails thus became what Stefan Goebel has termed, 'the emblem of a worldwide Christian-pacifist movement in the post-war era' and was part of 'transnational networks of remembrance'.¹⁶¹ Thus is made clear the centrality and significance of postwar urban internationalism – a phenomenon comprising intersecting and mediated forms of internationalism (secular and religious, socialist and humanist) galvanised in the wake of the mediated conflict that was the bombing war.

¹⁵⁸ J. Kaczka-Valliere and A. Rigby, 'Coventry – memorializing peace and reconciliation', *Peace & Change*, 33 (2008), 582-99 (pp. 589-90).

¹⁵⁹ J. Murray, 'Coventry no longer twinned with Volgograd in protest over Ukraine war', *Guardian*, 23 Mar. 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/23/coventry-no-longer-twinned-with-volgograd-protest-ukraine-war> accessed 12 Jan. 2023.

¹⁶⁰ C. M. Mangion, 'A new internationalism: endeavouring to "Build from this Diversity, Unity"', 1945-90', *Journal of Contemporary History* 55 (2020), 579-601.

¹⁶¹ Goebel, 'Commemorative cosmopolis', 178.