

The small man pictured here is towered over by a school football team. He's holding a football and the banner the team are holding reads Cologne 1954- 1994.

The text mentions that it might be the only time he's held a football.

The little man is my father Arnold Meier and he is pictured here in the grounds of the boys' grammar school in North Manchester where he taught for over 30 years.

Already 90 years old when this picture was taken, he had retired from teaching some 20 years previously but he kept in touch with colleagues and often liked to attend school events – the only person to laugh during a school performance of Carl Orff's Carmina Burana because he understood the risqué Latin text.

So why the football team, why north Manchester, why the banner?

Well my father- short in stature but a moral giant, had come to England from Cologne in the 1930s to continue his studies. He was a great linguist – mastering English, French, Latin and along with his native German. He studied in London, where he did a PhD and a teaching degree. Arnold Meier spent some of the war interned on the Isle of Man as an 'enemy alien'. His language skills came in useful on the Isle of Man camp where he was called upon to act as an interpreter and intermediary between the German internees and the British authorities. I remember him telling me that he managed to persuade the British officers to provide better food for the refugees, and even kosher food. After the war, he settled in Brighton where he taught at Wyttinghame College – a private school for refugee children that made the grand claim to be the Jewish Eton.

In the early 1950s he found a new job as head of Languages at Bury Grammar school to the North of Manchester. In 1954 he had the inspired and brave idea of setting up an exchange between Bury Grammar and Deutz Gymnasium, the school in Cologne where he had been a pupil. He knew that Germany probably was not the first choice of destination for pupils – remember this was only 8 years or so after the end of the second world war and resentment was still rife. Also numbers of pupils studying A-Level German were low – a familiar story for those of us who have been involved in language teaching as a career.

So he had the brilliant idea of making the event into a football exchange - the highlight being a football match between Bury Grammar School first X1 and the German equivalent. One year the English team would play an away game in Cologne and the following year would see the home match with the German pupils playing in Bury. Although school sport was not such a big thing in German schools, I seem to remember that the games were fairly evenly matched – mainly because many German students would play football for clubs outside school and also because many of the German boys, although still at school, were in their early twenties due to Germany's system of repeating a year if you didn't pass the end of year exam. The football game was the highlight of the trip but there were other activities arranged as well – social as well as cultural... but mainly social.

So 1954 was the first match, and the exchange has been going ever since. It was inspired to use football as a focus because football was so much part of the fabric of life in the North West of England.

The symbolic as well as the practical importance of the event are striking. My father evidently loved his school days—and the effects of the enforced hiatus, separation from his family and disruption of the Nazi years must have been difficult. Renewing ties with his old school and his former teachers was, for my father, an act of reconciliation. Cologne was devastated by Allied bombing and my father in his way was rebuilding bridges, mending those shattered ruins.. It was an act of inspired courage visionary and compassionate. His philosophy was always that we should try to forgive but not forget. He also said that we Jewish people should not hang our heads in shame. He is rightly featured in this exhibition under the theme of compassion. But his example is also one of courage.

Since the exhibition went online, we have been contacted by a teacher from his Cologne school who is researching lives of Jewish pupils who attended the school before the war. He has sent us copies of his school reports, his final A-Level Abitur papers, with detailed and rigorous comments from his teachers. The teacher informed me that many of the staff who my father renewed contact with in the 1950s did not have an exactly blameless record under the Nazi terror. I think my father, deep down, was aware of this. But this did not stop him forging those links and making sure that the message of tolerance and interaction lived on through contacts between the younger generations.

International friendships were formed thanks to those football exchanges and that should be a lesson to us all today.