

Hot off the Press 45!

Members recommend.....

The New Front

This is a new 6-part German police thriller from Walter Presents beginning Tuesday 3rd December at 12.45 am on Channel 4. It is in German with English subtitles.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-new-front>

Berlin Alexanderplatz, Alfred Döblin

BBC Radio 4 is airing a four-part serialisation of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Alfred Döblin's 1929 masterpiece set in the underworld of 1920s Berlin.

The book was originally translated into English in 1931, but this is a more recent (2018) translation by Michael Hofmann, which the BBC suggests gets closer to Döblin's original text.

The opening episode aired on Saturday 23 November at 3pm on Radio 4.

It is also be available on BBC Sounds of course.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/m0025bcc>

The WAGNER FAMILY in KINGSTON upon HULL,

In the East Riding of Yorkshire in the 20th Century

Christian Wagner (1877-1952) was born in Kocherstetten, Hohenlohe in the Kingdom of Wurttemberg. He was the youngest of five sons and so had no chance of inheriting the family house and fields and so had to make his life elsewhere.

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He trained as a pork butcher, probably initially in Kunzelsau (Hohenlohe's County Town) and travelled to England in 1893 when he was 16 years old. He was apprenticed to a German pork butcher in Liverpool who were probably known to the Wagner family back in Kocherstetten. *(Recent research suggests that many young men from Wurttemberg left Germany before they were 17 years of age to avoid compulsory military service that had been introduced in the Kaiser's new Reich.)*

Trying your luck across the North Sea was a well trodden path for young men from Hohenlohe and Christian was part of a third wave of pork butchers to emigrate to England (especially to the North) that had been going on since before Waterloo. (Germans were the largest Immigrant ethnic group in GB in the 19th Century

German pork butchers did not clash economically with British butchers who were beef and mutton butchers on the whole, whilst these German newcomers (almost all of them from this small Hohenlohe area in south Germany) were pork specialists and could produce a wide range of pork products that were regarded very favourably by their British customers, especially among the working class in the rapidly expanding industrial towns of the North of England.

By 1899 Christian Wagner had come back to Hull, the port where he originally landed, and opened a shop with Friedrich Kress who came from nearby Niedernhall (a small walled town 10 km away from Kocherstetten).

In **1899** they founded **KRESS AND WAGNER's pork butcher's business at 163 Spring Bank, Hull**. Other young German men set up Pork Butcher's shops in Hull at that time, but stayed German/ Wurttemberg nationals.

Among those helping in the family business was Friedrich's brother **Gottfried Kress and his sister Sophie Kress (1878-1971)**. When Sophie Kress came over to England is unclear, but she probably was over 20 years old, so her arrival would be around the turn of the 19th/20th Centuries. She went first to Bradford where she worked as a maid and shop assistant with a family that most likely came from Hohenlohe themselves and were know to the Kress family. There were many Germans in Bradford who had arrived at different times in the 19th century. Many of their businesses where in an area known as Little Germany, that was adjacent to the city centre. At some point Sophie Kress joined her brothers in Hull probably when Kress and Wagner Ltd. was founded in 1899. It is not known if she knew Christian Wagner from back home in Hohenlohe, but now she was working in the same shop and romance obviously bloomed.

Christian and Sophie Kress were married at the Lutheran Chapel in Hull on 11th June 1905

They had four daughters between 1906 and 1912. (Freda b. 1906, Emma b. 1907, Lucy b. 1910 and Elsa b. 1911.) Christian was desperate to have a son to carry on the business but it did not happen. In the fullness of time the four daughters, who were British nationals by birth, married four Englishmen. One was a butcher, **Wilfred Rudd**, who was the organist at St. Jude's in Hull, one a bank manager, **Harold Cox**, who had served as a sergeant in the East Yorkshire Regt. in the 1914-18 War. Another son-in-law was an accountant, **Thomas Cornwell**, who ran K&W after the Second World War, and the fourth son-in-law was

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Eric Bell, a schoolteacher at Malet Lambert H.S, who had been a wartime RAF Officer, and became the organist and choirmaster at St. Mary's Beverley.

So the family's name of Wagner died out in Hull by the 1970s.

The family during the 1914-18 War

Sometime in the Edwardian period Christian and Sophie got naturalised and became British citizens. So did Friedrich Kress but Gottfried Kress did not. Christian and Sophie probably became British citizens when they got married, certainly when their first child was born.

The outbreak of the war was a complete disaster for an Anglo-German family living near the city centre, although Spring Bank itself was a road of well-proportioned houses, almost a boulevard before WW1, with streets of terrace housing behind that provided the customers for K&W shops. They had two shops by 1914. Another at 82 Welbeck St. off Princes Avenue.

The business was boycotted by $\frac{3}{4}$ of their customers and no doubt many unpleasant taunts and threats were made to the family, especially as all other German nationals had been rounded up and sent to detention centres on the Isle of Man, including Gottfried Kress. So Christian and Sophie and their four young girls were the only visible people with a German connection for miles around.

Christian desperately wanted to communicate with his family in Germany and tell them that they were basically alright, although desperately worried and saddened by the war which now divided them.

On **15th November 1914** he wrote (in German) to his brother George in neutral USA. The letter on K&W headed notepaper explained how they were losing business but essentially carrying on. He asked his brother to send it on to the family in Germany and this he did. This must have contravened the DORA regulations and could technically be considered "spying".

In June 1915, after the first Zeppelin raid on Hull, that caused extensive damage and killed many people, angry mobs unable to defend their city and keen to get some retribution, attacked the shop at Spring Bank. This had been going on in London's East End for some time but it is believed it is the first such attack in Hull. It is reported in the history of the Hull City Police (p95) that the police had some difficulty bringing the crowd under control.

The family, who lived over the shop, must have been terrified for their lives. As windows were smashed and food looted, the six of them must have waited upstairs in great fear in case some hot heads dashed up and attacked them personally, or set the building on fire. But this was England and the mob went so far and no further, and then the police intervened and restored order. The present day Wagner family have no knowledge of such attacks happening again.

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But at some point in 1916 when Christian conscripted into the British Army, the shop was **boarded up and remained closed for the rest of the war.**

After **conscription was introduced in January 1916** for all able bodied men between 18 and 41, Christian Wagner was called up in the British Army. He was 38 years old and was sent not to the local East Yorkshire Regt. based at Beverley barracks, but to a battalion of the Middlesex Regt (either the 30th or the 31st (Labour) Battalions). which was composed of German, Austrian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish born British nationals. The battalion, whose men mainly came from London (hence Middlesex Regt.) was based at Aldershot and never served abroad. Christian served as a cook during his army service and never had to fight against the Germans. (The Kocherstetten 1914-18 War Memorial records two Wagner relatives both killed in France in 1917).

When the war was over Christian was demobbed and came back to his business and family, unlike the other German pork butchers from Hull who were sent back to Germany after their businesses had been confiscated.

The INTERWAR period

Christian and Sophie Wagner prospered in the interwar period and although they continued to live over the shop on Spring Bank, the firm expanded (4 shops eventually) and they became quite comfortably off, part of the new emerging middle class. Christian bought up new houses in western Hull and became a landlord of several properties, eventually living in one of them on Kingston Road after 1946.

The Second World War

In 1939 they were persuaded by their daughters to move to Springhead to avoid the expected air raids and they commuted from there to work every day. In May 1941 the Cornwell family, Tom, Freda and two year old John, joined them at 311 Kingston Road after their own house (190 Goddard Ave,) had been burnt out by incendiaries in one of the most intense of the many air raids Hull suffered in the war. The two families stayed together after the war at nearby **367 Kingston Road**, only selling the house in 1982 after Christian, Sophie, Freda and Tom had all died.

On **Christmas Eve 1944** Christian was inside the house (311 Kingston Road) when a **VI Flying Bomb** landed in the field opposite and blew out windows and doors of the house they were renting. One interior door crashed to the floor knocking off Christian's trilby hat. An inch another way and he would have most probably been killed, ironically by a German weapon.

Christian Wagner died in 1952 at the age of 75. Much respected by his business and social peers and especially by his workforce who he had trained up when they first left school. Many of them veterans of the Desert, Normandy, Bomber Command and the NW Europe campaign. A devout member of Ebenezer Chapel congregation (turned into a warehouse after 1945, now a builder's yard), Christian Wagner had spent his life building up his business, had little time for leisure pursuits and rarely took a holiday (*and then only to nearby Hornsea*) and never returned to Germany.

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One can only guess at the horror and deep disappointment he would feel at the demise of K&W in the early Seventies and the state of all their old shops today.

J.C.Cornwell

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