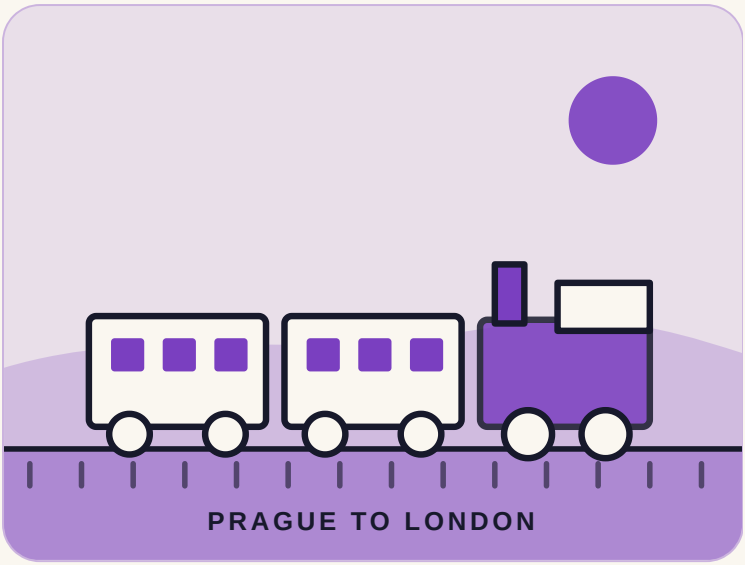

UNITED KINGDOM

The scrapbook in the attic

For 50 years, Nicholas Winton told no one he had helped save 669 children. Then his wife found a scrapbook.

WHERE	Maidenhead and Prague
WHO	Nicholas Winton, a London stockbroker who helped rescue children from Czechoslovakia
WHEN	1938 to 2015

4 min read

CHAPTER ONE

The story

In 1988, a woman named Grete was cleaning her attic in Maidenhead, England. She found an old scrapbook. It was full of photos of children and lists of names. She did not know any of them.

She asked her husband, Nicholas Winton, about it. He told her something he had never said. Fifty years earlier, he had helped to save 669 children.

Prague, 1938

In late 1938, Winton was a stockbroker in London. He had planned a ski holiday. Then a friend asked him to come to Prague, in Czechoslovakia, to help Jewish families. Nazi Germany was about to take over the country.

Winton found camps full of families who wanted to get their children to safety. Britain would take children under 17. But each child needed a home and a promise of £50. Someone had to find the homes and the money.

Winton stayed in Prague about three weeks. He wrote down names of children in his hotel room. Back in London, he spent evenings and weekends finding foster families and raising money. Others stayed on in Prague, such as Doreen Warriner and Trevor Chadwick. Winton said their work was vital.

> **We had 250 families waiting at Liverpool Street that day in vain.**
>
> NICHOLAS WINTON, QUOTED BY MENTAL FLOSS

669	250	1988
children reached Britain	children on the last train, which never left	year Grete found the scrapbook

The last train

From March to August 1939, groups of children left Prague by plane and by train. The last group was due to leave on 1 September 1939. That day, Germany invaded Poland. The war began, and the borders closed. About 250 children could not leave. Almost none of them are known to have survived.

Winton wrote to leaders in the United States, asking them to take children. He got no reply.

Found in the attic

In 1988, Grete gave the scrapbook to a Holocaust historian. A BBC show, That's Life, invited Winton as a guest. He sat in the audience. The host asked if anyone there owed their life to Nicholas Winton. Many people stood up.

Winton died in 2015, aged 106.

How it unfolded

- **1938** Winton goes to Prague and starts listing children.
- **1939** Children leave Prague from March. The last train is stopped on 1 September.
- **1988** Grete finds the scrapbook. Winton appears on That's Life.
- **2015** Winton dies, aged 106.

CHAPTER TWO

What makes it special

He told no one for fifty years. His own wife found out from a scrapbook in the attic.

He was one of many. Winton himself named the people in Prague whose work was vital.

OUR TAKE

Great kindness often looks like dull work: lists, forms, money and phone calls, done day after day.

CHAPTER THREE

What we can learn

1. **Say yes to the first step**

   He was planning a ski holiday. He changed course and went to Prague.

   Try this: When someone asks for help this week, say yes to one small first step.

2 Do the dull work

He wrote names, found homes and raised money, in the evenings and at weekends.

Try this: Pick one boring task for a cause you care about. Do it this week.

3 Share the credit

Others worked in Prague, and Winton named them as vital.

Try this: Name the people who share a task with you. Thank them in person.

4 Keep a record

The scrapbook let the children be found fifty years later.

Try this: Write down one thing you did for someone today. Keep it somewhere safe.

ONE THOUGHT TO TAKE AWAY

The quiet people may be saving the most.

Sources

Mental Floss
Meet Nicholas Winton, the Man Known as “Britain’s Schindler” (2017)

Holocaust Educational Trust
Holocaust Memorial Day 2016: Nicholas Winton, Our Hero, by Richard Ferrer

About Holocaust
Who was Nicholas Winton, and why did he bring 669 children from Czechoslovakia in 1938-39?

Wikipedia
Nicholas Winton

Fact-check note: The sources agree on the main story and differ on details. Number of children: 669 (Mental Floss, the Holocaust Educational Trust, Wikipedia); About Holocaust says the scrapbook Grete found had details of 664 children, and 669 in its title. The story says 669, the figure given in the other three. Trains: Mental Floss says seven trains carried 669 children before 1 September 1939 and an eighth was stopped; About Holocaust says the first transport left by air on 14 March 1939, seven more went by rail, and the last left on 2 August 1939; the story says only that groups left by plane and by train from March to August 1939. The last group, about 250 children, was due to leave on 1 September 1939 (Wikipedia); Mental Floss says they are believed to have died; Wikipedia says only two survived the war; the story says almost none are known to have survived. Winton's own part: he spent about three weeks in Prague and left in January 1939 (Wikipedia); others such as Doreen Warriner and Trevor Chadwick stayed on, and Winton said their roles were vital (Wikipedia); the story says this. The ski holiday and the call from a friend are from Mental Floss and Wikipedia; Wikipedia names Martin Blake, Marie Schmolka and Doreen Warriner as those who called him to Prague. The £50 promise and the age limit of 17 are from Wikipedia and Mental Floss. The scrapbook was found by Grete in her attic in Maidenhead (Mental Floss); the That's Life episode is from the Holocaust Educational Trust (half of the audience stood) and Wikipedia (the rest, children and grandchildren, then stood); the story says many people stood. The quote about 250 families is from Mental Floss. Winton's knighthood is dated 2002 (About Holocaust) or 2003 (Wikipedia, as honours of 31 December 2002 announced in 2003); the story omits it. "Wrote to leaders in the United States and got no reply" is from Mental Floss. The pin shows Maidenhead, where he lived. Lines marked "Our take" are interpretation. Everything else comes from the sources above.