

One Life

See Saw/ BBC Films. A film about the Czech Kindertransport

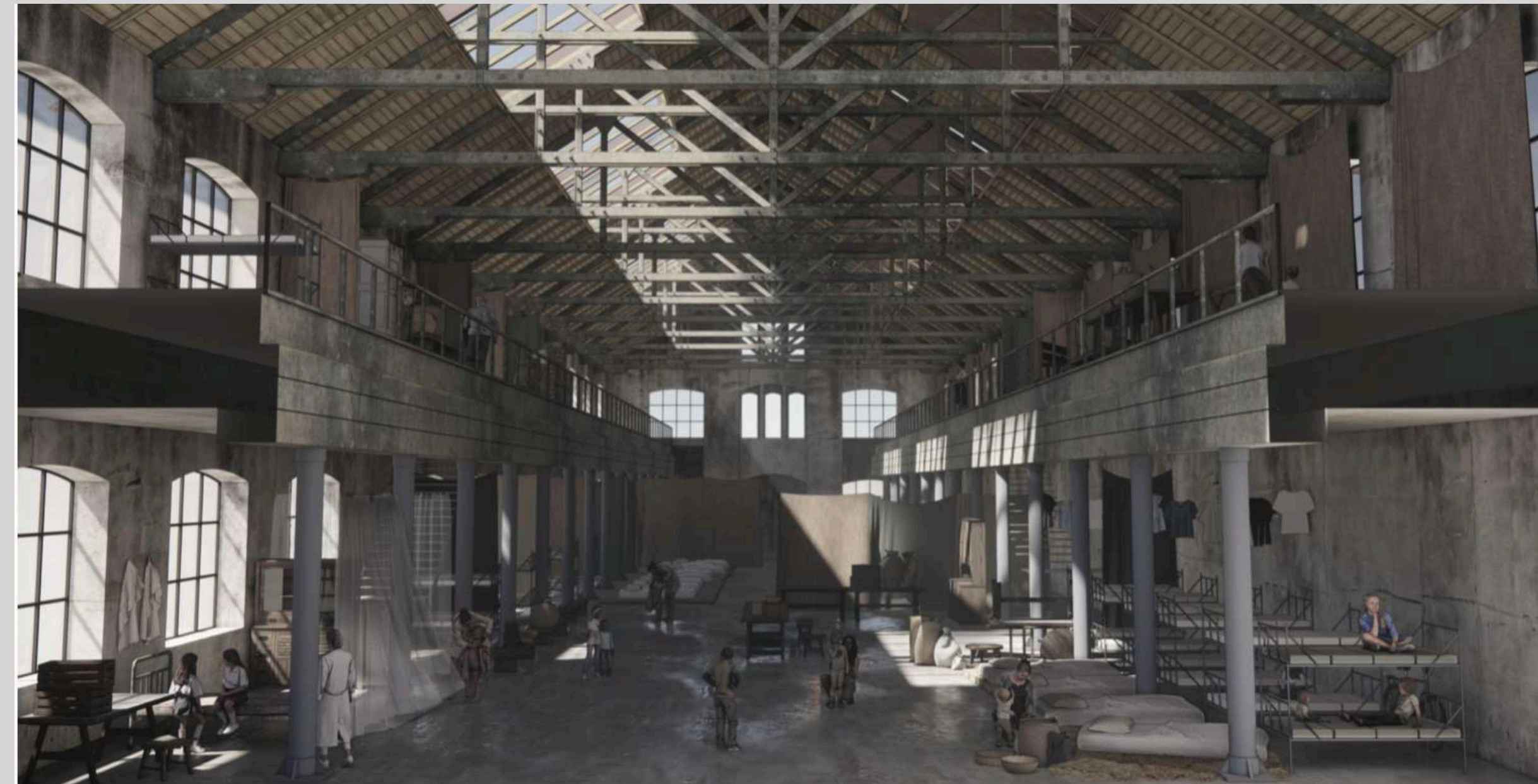


Prague Refugee Camp

Concept design for location build in Czech Republic

Exterior View: visual by Aline Leonello

Interior view: visual by Al'nur Nurmakhanov



Production Design Statement

Category 8, Feature Film:Period

One Life was an exciting project involving urgent storytelling across two distinct time frames.

The film explores the remarkable achievements of Nicholas Winton, who as a young man organised the evacuation of 669 children from Prague to London as part of the Kindertransport scheme. Some of this is told as events rapidly escalate in Czechoslovakia in 1938/9 following the Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland and subsequent occupation of Prague. The rest is told in the more measured reflections of the older Winton, enjoying an active retirement in 1980's Maidenhead.

We shot across two countries roughly corresponding to these different periods. Director James Hawes was determined to tell the story with as much accurate detail as possible, with the settings intended to subtly reflect the devastating historical events unfolding in Prague and the more elegiac passages in UK. The shoot was fast and furious: over just six weeks that unfortunately also included the unexpected challenges caused by the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the state funeral taking place adjacent to our production base in Central London. We had limited resources, as a British independent feature with a working budget of £9million.

The graphic design elements were especially important to explain the complicated bureaucratic obstacles needing to be overcome in record time before the children could be evacuated. Gabrielle Leon oversaw this, meticulously researching the story to make everything as accurate as possible. In Prague we worked with Czech photographer Honza Sakar, who photographed the supporting artists with a plate camera to replicate the period portraits of the children that are such a poignant reminder of all those left behind.

Philippa and I were fortunate to have a wonderful art department team both in London and Prague who managed to pull everything together in record time. Special mention should go to UK supervising art director Aline Leonello, Czech supervising art director Jan Kalous, art director Daniel Vaclavik and Czech set decorators Petra Vencelidesova and Klara Zimova.

Christina Moore, Production Designer "*One Life*", October 2023

LONDON

Winton's 1980's House, Maidenhead

Shot on location in London

The biggest challenge was to find a suitable house location for our main character. Nicholas Winton was a moderately successful stockbroker who lived modestly near Maidenhead, and having raised his family there was spending his retirement engaged in various charitable causes. The set dressing reflects the build-up of clutter associated with Winton's lifetime of energetic pursuits in contrast to the Scandinavian sensibility of his Danish wife Greta. This was beautifully achieved by set decorator Philippa Hart who used subtle period details and small indications of Winton's many interests, as well as including a few pieces of family furniture that would be seen in the earlier time frame in the Hampstead home of his mother Babette Winton and hint at his own Germanic roots.



“That’s Life” TV set

Studio set build

The climax of the film involved the recreation of the 1980’s *That’s Life* TV set, where Winton is movingly overwhelmed by a TV audience made up of the children that he rescued decades before. We built this in what seemed like an impossibly tight window at Pinewood Studios.



CZECH REPUBLIC

We then moved to the Czech Republic where we filmed the scenes from the 1930's that were set in London and Prague. Our biggest challenge was to create a large sprawling refugee camp in a derelict steelworks to the North of the country, where displaced families are kept in desperate conditions and Winton realises that huge numbers of children have no means of escape. We also created contrasting sets built across many different locations: the headquarters of various Czech underground organisations, a Rabbi's study, the upmarket offices of a London stockbrokerage, a glamorous Prague hotel, the Hampstead home of the Winton family. To save on costs we built these last two sets on location in a country house near Prague, one set inside the other, a bit like a Russian doll. I do not recommend this! All these sets had a lot of intricate period detail, involving layers of graphics and furnishings.

Sroubek Hotel, Prague

Shot on location in Czech Republic

Winton's 1930's House, London

Set build in Czech Republic



Railway Stations: Prague and London

Shot on location in Czech Republic & UK

Of most importance to our story were the train stations. We were fortunate to film at Wilson station, the actual point of departure for the Czech Kindertransport, and now chillingly the arrival point for many Ukrainian refugees, mostly women and children fleeing the war. The contemporary relevance of our film was not lost on those of us who witnessed this. The challenges of prepping and filming in a large fully operational international railway station are considerable, involving overnight get ins and necessitating the art department attaching reams of vac form panelling over the modern glass balustrading ourselves. We also filmed at Liberec station near the Polish border and Didcot in UK, where we had access to English rolling stock. We transported scenery across these different locations to tie them together architecturally.

Prague Station

Shot on location in Prague

Liverpool Street Station

Shot on location in Czech Republic

