

# “Our publications are available worldwide”:

## A forgotten German printer and his global connections 1887-1939

Dr. Edel Sheridan-Quantz

*Freelance geography translator, researcher and author, Hannover, Germany.*

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, printing was an important sector in the North German city of Hannover. The city was the world leader in the industrial production of account books; the product itself had been invented there. It is all the more surprising that the fourth-largest printing works in the city in the 1920s should have been almost entirely forgotten by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a Jewish-owned firm, the family business of A. Molling & Comp. had been forced to sell during the Nazi dictatorship and its owners emigrated in the late 1930s.

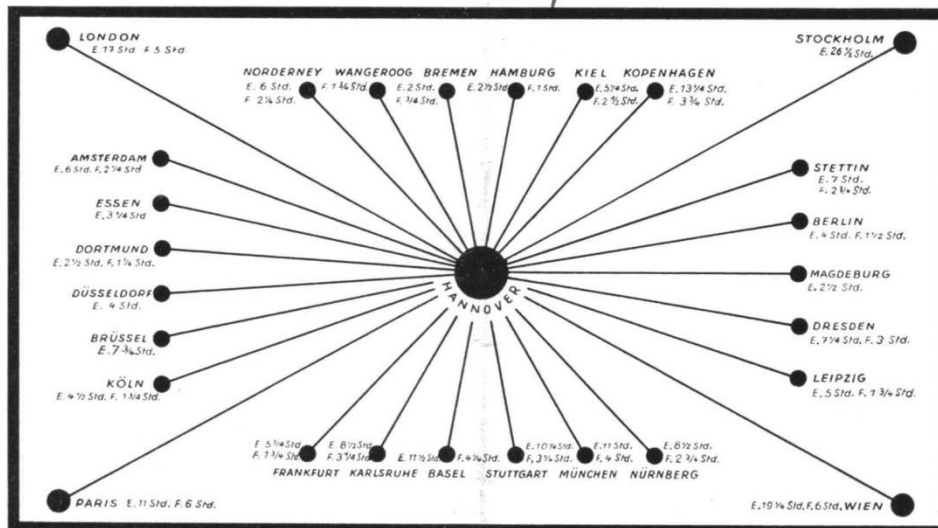
In the absence of the more obvious sources such as company records, much of the history of the firm could only be traced through its products. Unusually for Hannover, as well as printing colour advertising and packaging for many well-known companies, Molling had specialised in children’s picture books, which were marketed worldwide. Editions of their books were sold as far afield as Indonesia, Estonia, South America and the USA. This article presents a brief account of the firm, highlighting the analysis of surviving products to trace the ramifications of Molling’s international contacts, including work for world-famous companies such as Raphael Tuck of London. The study is of interest to historical geographers, economic and urban historians and book historians. The research fills a gap not only in the specific, local historical geography of Hannover, but also in our knowledge of aspects of globalisation in the early twentieth century.

### 1 Introduction – gaps and questions

A particular challenge to the urban historical geographer is presented by the gaps in urban fabric and urban memory. Many elements of urban landscapes are short-lived, and repeated redevelopment of sites has been the norm since the very first urban settlements. However, when even the memory of the past has been obliterated and the more obvious sources are not adequate, new approaches are necessary. The case of the printer/publisher A. Molling & Comp. of Hannover, Germany, is a micro-study of a single company that ties in exemplarily with the development of urban industrial districts, innovations and changes in printing in Germany, Europe and globally and the development of international business networks.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of growth and industrial development for Hannover, like many cities in Germany. The city gained tremendously in centrality when it was connected to the railway in 1842. The railway not only played an important role in the eastward shift of the city’s commercial centre out of the historic urban core towards the new railway station (Sheridan-Quantz 1997), but also provided a focus for industrial development. Hannover was the midpoint of what was initially a two-day rail journey on the main east-west line from Berlin to the Rhineland, and the important north-west route from Hamburg to Munich also passed through the city. This advantage was clearly perceived and frequently cited by contemporaries. A typical example is the schematic “map” published in a municipal brochure promoting the city, which shows travel times (Fig. 1) to destinations such as London, Stockholm, Paris and Vienna and exhorts the reader to “visit Hannover at all seasons”.

August 1931.



# HANNOVER ERWARTET SIE

mit Auto, Eisenbahn und Flugzeug. Sie finden hier in dem geistigen und wirtschaftlichen Mittelpunkt Nordwestdeutschlands nicht nur eine alte Stadt mit zahlreichen Sehenswürdigkeiten und Erinnerungen an eine bedeutende Vergangenheit, sondern auch eine moderne Großstadt mit einer weltumspannenden Industrie, mit vornehmen Geschäftsstraßen, Vergnügungsstätten und reichen Unterkunftsmöglichkeiten. Hannover ist die Stadt der Grünanlagen und Parks; es ist die Großstadt der Erholung; der gegebene Ort für Tagungen und Ausstellungen; der Ausgangspunkt für Ausflüge in die schönsten Teile Niedersachsens, nämlich in den Harz, in das Weserbergland und in die Heide. Der Besuch Hannovers ist daher auch für Sie lohnend

# ZU ALLEN JAHRESZEITEN!

Fig. 1 Schematic portrayal of Hannover's centrality, Fremdenverkehrs- und Ausstellungsamt der Stadt Hannover [1931]

By the 1870s Hannover was one of 12 urban settlements in the German *Reich* classified statistically as a *Großstadt* or city, i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more. The city's population grew from 25,916 in 1842, to 122,843 in 1880 and 399,100 in 1920 (*Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* 1880, p. 7 & 1925, p. 4; *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Hannover* 1914, pp. 1 & 2; Asche 1926).

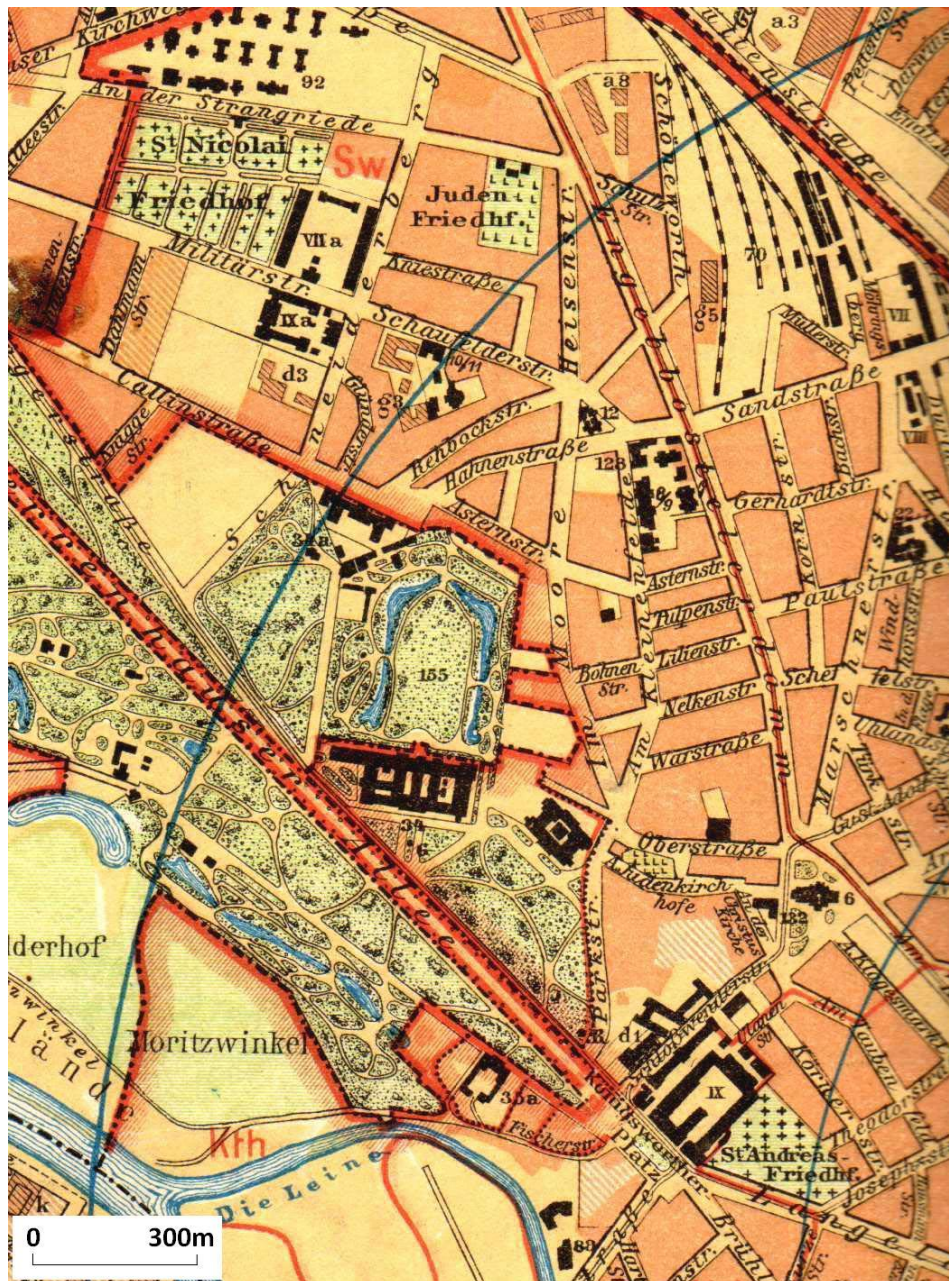


Fig. 2 Map of Hannover (detail) from Asche [1924]:2. The partially visible blue circles show distance from the central railway station (south-east of this extract) in kilometres. Molling's works (d3) was just over 2km from the station.

Within the urban area, industrial production was concentrated in two major locations: in Linden immediately west of Hannover, which was incorporated into the city in 1920, and in the suburbs that emerged to the north of the historic city centre, west and east of the main north-south railway line. Hannover's best-known firms include Hanomag (machinery, locomotives, motor cars), Continental (rubber products), Pelikan (inks and pens), Sprengel (chocolate) and Bahlsen (biscuits). Hannover was also the worldwide centre for the industrial production of printed account books. This product was invented in Hannover in the 1850s by the printing firm König & Ehardt, which became the world leader in the sector and employed more than 1,000 workers in the 1920s.

Asche's *Heimat-Atlas* (Home Atlas), which was used in Hannover schools from 1907 until the late 1930s to teach pupils about the history and development of the city, maps "significant industrial enterprises". Four companies are listed in the category "account book factories and fine art works" – the first being König & Ehardt and the third A. Molling & Comp. (d1 and d3 respectively in Fig. 2). But unlike most of the enterprises listed in the atlas, there is no reference to Molling in any recent standard publications on the historical development of the city. However, the company is mentioned in the literature on one of Hannover's most famous twentieth century citizens, the Dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). Schwitters experimented with printing techniques to create abstract lithographs in Molling's works. He also collected misprints in the basement of the works, using them to create artwork, and his

innovative fairy tales *Die Märchen vom Paradies* (Paradise Fairy Tales) were printed by Molling (Umland & Sudhalter 2008, pp. 297-298). But in spite of this significant connection, no research had ever been carried out on the printer who thus facilitated the work of a most unconventional artist. Nothing was known about the size, scope or nature of their business or its place in the industrial geography of Hannover or wider networks. The original works buildings were destroyed by Allied bombs in 1943, and the site has twice been completely redeveloped since then.

## 2 Filling the gaps I – conventional sources

The more obvious and conventional sources for urban historical geography research in Germany are similar to those available in Irish cities: maps (printed and manuscript), city directories, statistical yearbooks, postcards and photographs, commercial and industrial directories and contemporary publications. These sources made it possible to trace the physical expansion of A. Molling & Comp. and to estimate its relative significance within the printing sector in Hannover.

A lively family history (Krakauer 1995) provides some background information on the firm's founder, Adolf Molling (1830-1894) – but his descendants' lack of knowledge about his businesses, and in particular about the printing works, mirrored the absence of information in published studies of Hannover. They were merely aware of the general fact that the company had specialised in picture books.

Adolf Molling was an active member of the Jewish community in Hannover and had a successful career as a banker; the bank he founded in 1856 specialised in lotteries. A file in the Hannover city archives relating to the street on which the printing works was located, Schneiderberg, reveals that he purchased the site on which the works was later built in 1877 (Stadtarchiv Hannover, *Wegeakte* 3212). The printing business was established in 1887, operating from rented premises until the new building was completed in 1890 or 1891 (Fig. 3). The site was wisely chosen, conveniently close to the railway (goods) station Möhringsberg (marked "VIII" in the north-east corner of the map in Fig. 2).

From the start the company specialised in colour printing, using the then revolutionary technique of chromolithography (colour lithography). At the time, colour printing was on the threshold of an unprecedented boom. The Nuremberg printer Ernest Nister, soon to be known worldwide, set up in business in 1877 and opened a London office in 1888. German immigrant Raphael Tuck was already selling colour picture books from London and added the new medium of the postcard to his range in the early 1890s. He was soon marketing his products worldwide. They were designed in England but printed in Germany, at least until 1915. In Germany the number of printing works was growing rapidly, and the sector was in transition from a craft to an industry.



**Fig. 3 Molling works, Schneiderberg, Hannover, as shown in a 1901 company brochure**

The figures for Hannover reflect nation-wide developments. The number of firms was increasing, and the scale of many printing works expanding so that traditional small backyard premises no longer sufficed. As a result, the industry began to shift from the city centre into the new suburbs. In 1880, all but two of the 27 printers recorded in the Hannover city directory were located in the city centre (92.59 percent). In 1920 a total of 127 printers are recorded, and only 36.22 percent (46 firms) remained in the city centre.

In 1930, 4,988 people were employed in printing in Hannover (*Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Hannover* 1930, pp. 95-96) and over 3,300, or 66 percent, worked in the six largest firms. In 1903 A. Molling & Comp. employed 300 workers and 450 in 1926, making the company the fourth-largest printer in the city (*Der Kinderwelt* 1903; *Etzold* 1926, pp. 66-69; *Fremdenverkehrsverein Hannover* 1927, p. 294; *Siedentopf & Leonhardt* 1927, p. 131).

In response to the growth of the company, a second, single-storey building was built between 1904 and 1913 (Fig. 4). A further factory building was also erected on the site and from 1913-1933 this was let to a firm specialising in filing systems. A smaller building opening directly onto the street housed Molling's offices (ground floor and first floor) and some of the factory foremen lived on the upper two floors (*Adreßbuch Hannover* 1880, 1901 & 1913-33; *Topographische Karte Hannover* 1931/39).

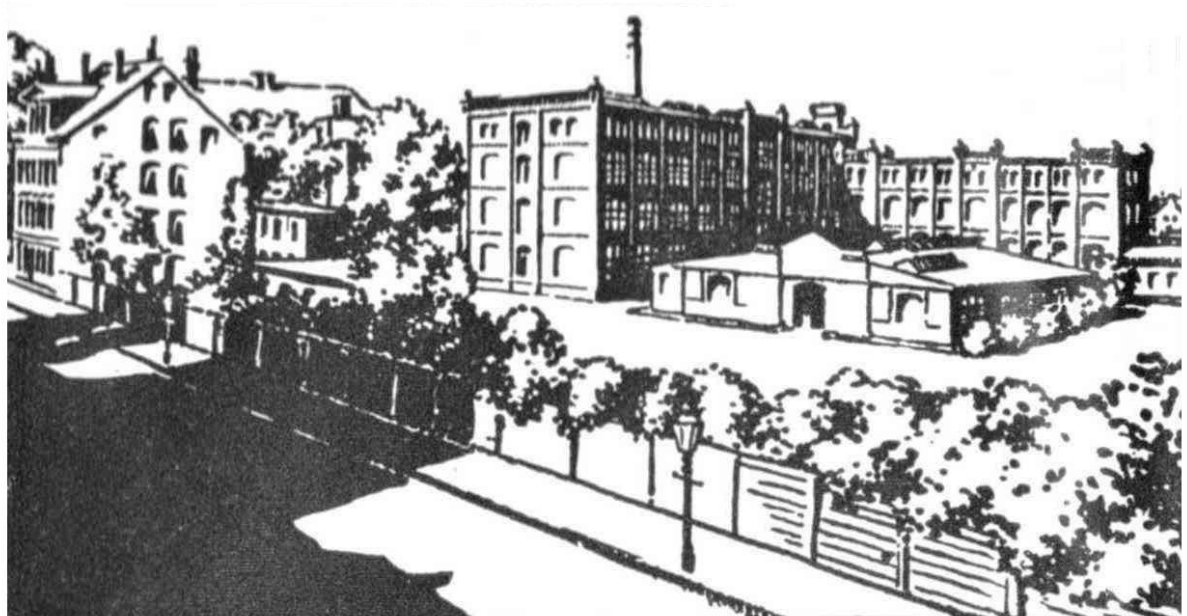


Fig. 4 The Molling complex in 1913, from an advertisement pasted into the author's copy of Kirsten's *Umbildung der Chromolithographie*, 1913



Fig. 5 The building on the Molling site let to Grunewald's Registrator & Co. 1913-1933 and to the printer Dreske & Krüger from 1934, as shown on a Dreske & Krüger letterhead from 1939. This building was to the right of the buildings in Fig. 4

Thus the “conventional” sources give a picture of a sizeable enterprise, an industrial complex which must have had a considerable impact on the local area, for example in the form of traffic – workers, raw materials, finished products and probably representatives of commercial customers. Two company catalogues for 1903 and 1904 (with a supplementary list for 1905) survive. The quote translated to provide the title of this article, “Verlagsartikel in der ganzen Welt vertreten” (“publications available worldwide”) is taken from the introduction to the 1904 catalogue, and suggests an influence that extended far beyond the local. The products listed for 1903, 1904 and 1905 include painting books and picture books as well as prints, illuminated bible texts, postcards, calendars and a folding lithographed cardboard dolls’ house. But the catalogues alone provide no clue as to the nature of this “worldwide” availability. To explore this aspect of the company’s production it was necessary to experiment with other sources.

### 3 Filling the gaps II – less usual sources

The first group of sources less usually used by geographers consists of official files now deposited in the Lower Saxony State Archives, and originally created during the Third Reich by the fiscal authorities (*Oberfinanzpräsidium*).

These files can be divided into two groups. Firstly, files created in the context of a Weimar Republic law controlling the use of foreign currency (passed in 1931). This law was utilised by the Nazi regime to persecute Jewish businesses, pursuing trivial and often unintentional violations to give Jewish owners a “criminal” file. The second group of state files consists of documents concerned with the “Aryanisation” process whereby Jewish-owned businesses passed into the hands of “Aryan” owners, and the complex bureaucracy regulating the subsequent emigration of many of the Jewish entrepreneurs. In many cases the files are incomplete – losses being due to war damage, poor archiving over many decades and the (post-War) desire on the part of officials to play down the role they played during the Third Reich.

Two aspects of the information yielded by these files are of particular interest here. One set of documents relating to outstanding payments owed to Molling by foreign customers, all concerning trivial sums, reveals that Molling had customers in Latvia, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Argentina (Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover 210 Acc. 2004/011 Nr. 183).



**Fig. 6** The shipping office at Molling's works, from a 1901 company brochure. The crate on the right is marked *Ausfuhrgut* or "goods for export". The porter's cap bears the company's name in gold letters.

Another file contains documents relating to a business trip to Italy planned in 1937 by Rudolf Frensdorff, co-owner of the firm since 1927 (Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hann. 210 Acc. 2004/25 Nr. 1070). His intention was to secure the Italian rights to a picture book produced by Molling for which English (1933) and French rights already existed and were bringing in foreign earnings. The book is in itself interesting, an “interactive” book called *Kling Klang. Das tönende Bilderbuch* and a licensed edition published in England by Spear (of “Scrabble” fame) as *Ding Dong. Spear’s Musical Picture Book*. These books contain a working xylophone fixed to the inside of the back cover and visible through rectangular cut-outs at every page opening, and a small wooden hammer to play the instrument (Fig. 7). (see Sheridan-Quantz 2011b). Not only are they a striking example of the inventiveness of A. Molling & Comp., they also point to the usefulness of a further group of sources not yet explored by geographers.



Fig. 7 *Kling Klang. Das tönende Bilderbuch (Nr. 2517)* and *Ding Dong. Spear's Musical Picture Book (blue version)*

These sources consist of Molling's products, or rather one particular group of products, insofar as these could be traced and examined. As well as printing advertising, packaging and books for industrial and commercial customers, Molling specialised in the production of picture books for children. These turned out to be an especially rich and wholly unexplored source. The images produced by a society at any given time document its world view. Images have become established as the subject for geographical study since the publication of Cosgrove and Daniels' influential book *The iconography of landscape* (1988).

But the sources and international distribution of images in books, although studied by book historians, for instance (Klingberg 2008), have not been examined by geographers. Among the first Molling books discovered in the course of this research were two thin paperbacks containing Grimm's fairy tales *Snow-White and Rose-Red* and *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarves* printed in Italian and discovered in a (Dutch!) antiquarian bookseller's stock. The existence of German, French, English and possibly Italian versions of *Kling Klang* seemed to confirm that these Italian tales were not an isolated oddity, but part of a general pattern.

The internet is an invaluable tool for this aspect of the research. It gives instant access to the catalogues of scientific libraries worldwide – and many antiquarian booksellers' websites not only provide images of the books for sale but include booksellers from many countries. Research that only a few decades ago could have required years of (expensive) travel can now be carried out far more quickly and at relatively little expense. This specific search for Molling publications was augmented by a close study of modern research publications on historic picture books. In this way, it was possible to collate bibliographical information for more than 200 published titles. It emerged that many of Molling's illustrators were British rather than German.

Thus it was possible to establish, for example, that the illustrations for the two Italian fairy tales mentioned above came from English editions designed for Raphael Tuck and "Printed at the Fine Art Works in Germany". The means by which these illustrations came to be used by Molling are suggested by an invoice issued by Molling in 1899 for the export (to America) of stereotype plates, (Historisches Museum Hannover VM 47569). Metal stereotype plates were a practical means of exporting "image carriers" for chromolithographic prints and publications, lighter and therefore cheaper to transport than lithographic stones. The invoice, made out in English on a form printed in English,



concerns plates for four picture books, with English titles and publisher's numbers given. Remarkably, an internet search of picture books for sale turned up all four titles – all of which were published by Raphael Tuck. Therefore, it appears that Molling was one of the hitherto unidentified German printers working for Tuck. It would also seem that Molling used the plates or stones to print these images for publications of their own. So far more than three dozen publications with identical illustrations published by Tuck in English and by Molling in German, Italian, French and Estonian have been identified (see Sheridan-Quantz 2013).



Fig. 8 Illustration by British artist Hilda Cowham in Molling's *Ferienfreuden* [1910] containing untranslated English text. The English original *In our holidays* was published by Raphael Tuck and printed "at the Fine Arts Works in Germany"

Internal evidence from the books examined is also suggestive. Many illustrations in Molling publications are the work of British illustrators and/or contain fragments of English text (Fig. 8). An odd example is a book of nursery rhymes with a hieroglyphic text, obviously – and with difficulty – translated from English. The German version of "Who killed Cock Robin?" could only barely be made to fit the little images of cocks, robins etc. that make perfect sense when combined with the original English text (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9 "Who killed Cock Robin?" On the left Molling's German version, with a text that doesn't fit the hieroglyphs, and on the right the same image manipulated by the author to include the original English text of the rhyme which fits well around the hieroglyphs. From *Tolle Sachen für's Kind zum Lachen* (1904)



Fig. 10 Dutch edition of Molling's *Rattenfänger von Hamelen* (*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*) (1920), published by Becht of Amsterdam and almost certainly printed by Molling. The book contains a contemporary bookseller's sticker from Surabaya in East Java.



Fig. 11 Molling's *Snow-White* – German, American and Danish editions (1913-1917)

Molling's publications were not limited to derivatives of Tuck books. They published dozens of books illustrated by German artists, some of them of very high quality. And many of these were published in several languages. One series of ten large (quarto) oblong picture books of fairy tales from Grimm was also published in Dutch, Danish and English (Fig. 11; see Sheridan-Quantz 2011a). The author's copy of the Dutch edition of Molling's *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* has the added interest of a bookseller's sticker from Surabaya on East Java in Indonesia, evidently from the Dutch colonial period (Fig. 10).

Although this evidence of Molling’s international activity is not quantifiable, it does give an idea of the range of the firm’s connections; books in German, English, French, Dutch, Danish, Italian, Estonian and prints for Swedish publishers have been identified. According to an advertisement placed in the popular weekly magazine *Die Woche* in 1912, their picture books could be ordered “in all languages” and were in stock in Spanish and Portuguese as well as German.

A study of a company’s products does not reveal the means by which such international contacts were established. But it has been possible to find some evidence of the way in which Molling conducted such business in the early twentieth century. The files already cited relating to *Kling Klang* mention one such method – travel by a representative of the company. Historic passenger lists available online (Ellis Island passenger lists at [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org), Bremen passenger lists at [www.bremer-passagierlisten.de](http://www.bremer-passagierlisten.de)) reveal, for example, that Franz Rosenberg, a co-owner of A. Molling & Comp. before the First World War, and several representatives of Samuel Gabriel and Sons of New York who published American editions of Molling books, crossed the Atlantic numerous times, possibly on such business trips.

Another means of establishing and maintaining such contacts is to open foreign branch offices and to advertise internationally; Molling had an office in Aldersgate Street in the City of London for a short period in the mid-1890s (London Directory 1895), and placed advertisements in New York and Toronto journals (Fig. 12). Trade fairs and world fairs also provided a forum for national and international exchange, and Molling exhibited at the Antwerp (1894), St. Louis (1904) and Brussels (1910) World Fairs as well as at the Children’s World International Exposition held in St. Petersburg from December 1903 to January 1904.



Fig. 12 Molling advertisement from the New York journal *Walden's Stationer and Printer* (1907)

## 4 Conclusion

Of course the evidence of Molling’s global activities presented so briefly here is impressionistic; the sources do not allow for a weighing of the relative importance of different international contacts. Indeed, it is not even possible to estimate the total number of books published by A. Molling & Comp., or circulation figures. But the material does show that the type of self-image propagated by Hannover’s tourist authority in the 1931 schematic “map” of the city’s centrality shown in Fig. 1 did have a foundation in reality – and that there is yet much to be discovered in this area, for A. Molling & Comp., for Hannover and for urban and industrial historical geography.



Fig. 13 Illustration in *From Many Lands. Europe* published by Raphael Tuck and printed “at the Fine Art Works in Germany”. Molling published a German edition in 1904 and used the chromolithographs from this book and three others in the same series for their own book *Kleine Erzählungen aus fremden Ländern* (Little tales from foreign lands) [1905]

#### Archival material

Historisches Museum Hannover VM 47569 (Molling export invoice 1899)

Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover 210 Acc. 2004/011 Nr. 183

Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hann. 210 Acc. 2004/25 Nr. 1070

Stadtarchiv Hannover, *Wegeakte* 3212

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### **Biographical statement**

Edel Sheridan-Quantz studied Geography and German at UCD, Bonn and Göttingen. she completed a PhD in urban historical geography and works as a freelance geography translator, researcher and author in Hannover, Germany.

### **Contact details**

Dr. Edel Sheridan-Quantz, Lüneburger Damm 9, 30625 Hannover, Germany

Tel. : +49-511-5635919

Email: sheridan-quantz@t-online.de