

AJR journal

Association of Jewish Refugees

The false prophet

Size has often been quoted as an indicator of rightness and it is a fact of life that victory tends to be on the side of the big battalions. A pre-war panegyric of Stalin's Russia was entitled *The Socialist Sixth of the World* and, judging by the fact that the Islamic Conference at the UN embraces 57 states within the world body, one might currently talk about the Islamic Third of the World (the United Nations has around 180 members).

In fact, Muslims number 'only' 1,300 million out of a global population of around six billion. World Jewry, on the other hand, languishes at around the 13 million mark. Put bluntly, the worldwide ratio of Muslims to Jews is 100 to one.

In October Malaysian ex-premier Mahathir Mohamed addressed the UN's Islamic Conference on the topic of that imbalance. He asserted that the few Jews ruled the world by proxy and got others to fight their wars for them - but ultimately the 1,300 million-strong body of Muslims would not be defeated. He also claimed that the Jews had invented 'Socialism, Communism, Democracy and Human Rights' as their instruments for exercising global domination.

Now, to be credited with the invention of democracy and human rights might appear a back-handed compliment - but that is not how it is seen from the fundamentalist Islamist perspective. Iranian hard-line clerics described the recent award of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize to a lawyer campaigning for women's rights as a European-instigated subversion of Islamic values.

But there was worse to come. At the UN's Islamic Conference no single representative - even from pro-Western states - dared put his head above the parapet to disavow Mahathir Mohamed's melange of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *Mein Kampf* and *Der Stürmer*.



Ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamed

Nor was the entire West as outraged by this conjuring up of the mindset that led to Auschwitz. President Chirac showed deplorable hesitation before condemning it. He was assisted in his obfuscation tactics by Greece, a state so viscerally hostile to Israel that even the Malaysian premier's attribution of democracy to the Jews - though the honour rightfully belongs to Athens - has not made any difference. On the other hand, the US, UK and Italy have been instant in their condemnation of Mahathir's outburst, which must put Jewish critics of the Bush-Blair-Berlusconi axis into an increasingly

untenable position. How long can they keep calling down 'a plague on both your houses' when one party to the conflict - irrespective of whether it is headed by Saddam, bin Laden or Mahathir Mohamed - asserts that the defence of Islam requires war on the Jews?

On the broader front, the abovementioned self-appointed defenders of Islam are aiming to turn the hitherto relatively limited 'war on terror' into a global War of Civilisations. In this war, Christianity, the professed faith of the West, will be misrepresented by hard-line Islamists as both still imbued with the lethal spirit of the Crusades and as manipulated by the Jews.

How confused the situation could be is demonstrated by the following. In southern Iraq the inhabitants, no doubt influenced by their clergy, have in some instances taken to referring to Coalition soldiers as Jews. Since Poland has contributed a contingent to the occupying force, it may well happen that conscripts from Jedwabne, whose grandfathers massacred their Jewish neighbours in 1941, are now dubbed 'Jews' by Shia Iraqis.

But to return to the wider picture. The leaders of the Coalition face a daunting task. The campaign on which they have embarked and which they conceive as a war on terror stands in danger of being elevated into a religious war. Their task in Iraq is to harmonise the demands of democracy with those of religion. If, to look at a worst-case scenario, the Shia majority votes to turn their country into a replica of Iran, can the will of the majority be allowed to prevail?

Being nose about Fagin

Richard Grunberger

The subject of noses has always held great fascination for me (and not for me alone - think of what Pascal said about the effect of Cleopatra's nose on world history!). I treasure such arcane bits of nasal knowledge as the Danish astronomer Tycho de Brahe's acquisition of a silver nose after a duelling opponent had sliced off part of his proboscis.

Altering nose shapes has been a task allotted to makeup experts (and plastic surgeons) at least since Edmond Rostand wrote the box-office hit *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Recently practitioners of that art scored a minor triumph by transforming the *retroussé* profile of Nicole Kidman into the aquiline likeness of Virginia Woolf in the film *The Hours*.

But the major triumph of prosthetic art on screen surely occurred in 1948 when a British studio filmed Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. In the movie the caftan-clad, greasy-haired Fagin sported a false nose more appropriate to a medieval gargoyle on a church roof than to a human being. The actor appearing in that repellent disguise was Alec Guinness, continuing his climb to fame that had started two years earlier with *Great Expectations*.

We learn from Piers Paul Read's biography of the actor that he was probably the illegitimate son of a profligate member of the top drawer Guinness clan. As it happened, a highly respectable Guinness, ennobled as Lord Moyne, was wartime British Resident-General in the Middle East. HM Government's Palestine White Paper of 1939 - written to appease the Arabs - was in force throughout the war, and Lord Moyne rigorously enforced the ban on Jewish immigration. This made him a hate figure throughout the *Yishuv*, and in November 1944 two members of the Stern Gang assassinated him in Cairo.

Is it entirely fanciful, I wonder, to suspect that the image of Fagin Guinness created on screen owed something to vengeful feelings stirred by the murder of his near-relative?



PHOTO: RONALD CHANNING

Sir Sigmund Sternberg was awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* by the French Ambassador, who paid generous tribute to his efforts in promoting tolerance and understanding between peoples of different religious persuasions. In his reply, Sir Sigmund recalled that earlier this year President Jacques Chirac had declared that France would not tolerate antisemitism. He went on to express the hope that inter-faith dialogue would develop in France in the manner of the Three Faiths Forum of which he was co-founder in Britain.

Berlin Holocaust memorial building setback

The construction of Germany's long-awaited national Holocaust Memorial to the victims of Europe's murdered Jews and others, begun this September near the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, was halted the following month, reports *The Times*. To protect the memorial's 2,700 concrete pillars against graffiti, a contractor began using chemicals produced by Degussa AG, part-owner of the company which produced Zyklon B gas used to kill victims in extermination camps.

The chairman of the foundation responsible for the building of the memorial, the Speaker of the German Parliament, Wolfgang Thierse, said that alternative chemicals were being sought. Foundation member Lea Rosh, who initiated the idea of a memorial in 1988, said that 'we had to make this decision for the survivors.' The memorial has been designed by American architect Peter Eisenman, winner of an international competition.

Calling all forces

To mark its 80th anniversary, AJEX, the Association of Jewish Ex-Service Men and Women, is inviting all of Jewish faith who served in HM Forces from 1939 to 1960 to answer a questionnaire by providing a summary of their and their family's service details (including those now disabled or deceased). Replies will be inscribed in a special book as a comprehensive record of the contribution made by Jews to the defence of the realm.

Following World War I a *British Jewry Book of Honour* provided details of those who served during that conflict (it is now posted on the 'Moving Here' website: www.movinghere.org.uk). A record of those who gave their lives in World War II has already been published by AJEX.

For further details on how to register, please contact AJEX House, East Bank, London N16 5RT tel 0208 800 2844.

RDC

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Great - but not necessarily Booker-approved - books

Richard Grunberger

First the good news about the Big Read. Thanks to the publicity generated by the BBC competition, book sales nationwide have gone up appreciably. 'It has given the industry a *huge* boost,' said a Waterstone spokesperson.

Next the bad news: a third of the final 21 shortlisted works are children's books à la Winnie-the-Pooh or Harry Potter. This suggests either many readers' somewhat pathetic yearning to return to the nursery, or their abandonment of the reading habit soon after leaving school. But there's more bad news. Not only have some of the all-time British greats from George Eliot to Thackeray been ignored, but Jewish writers are woefully underrepresented (for all that Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* made it into the top 21). Nobody expects Kafka - or even Proust - to be nominated, but what about such accessible towering literary heroes as Philip Roth and Saul Bellow?

Something else the poll shows is the insularity of the great British reading public. No huge surprises there, cynics might say, but I was still amazed at how little the average reader is swayed by the pundits, who for years have sung the praises of the *nouveau roman* and the 'magic realist' school (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende). In fact, not a single French- or Spanish-speaking writer even qualified for the long list of 100 titles. The only long-listed German author was Patrick Susskind with *Perfume*; why that admittedly finely crafted, atmospheric horror story should have outdistanced Günter Grass' *Tin Drum* - the subject of an excellent film - defies my comprehension.

Of course the transfer of books to the screen is of huge significance in the popularity stakes, and most of the short-listed books may first have impinged on

readers' consciousness in their film (or TV) version. Not that cinematic treatment necessarily does a book any favours. I can think of at least two outstanding novels - Louis de Bernière's (shortlisted) *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and Graham Swift's (unplaced) *Waterland* - where I thought the film a travesty of the book.

The converse can also apply sometimes. Some ten years ago the film director Robert Altman had the inspired idea of taking several of Raymond Carver's short stories and melding them together into an interconnected whole; already something of a Carver fan, I became an absolute aficionado after seeing *Short Cuts* on the screen.

Lastly, given that I put the Booker Prize into the title of this piece it might be appropriate to say something about this year's winner, DBC Pierre. TV viewers who watched the awards ceremony will have been startled by the author's inarticulate response, and even more by the revelation that he is a reformed drug addict with a near-criminal record. And this wasn't just PR hype designed to generate publicity for *Vernon God Little* - the man really has a shady past.

In that he fits into the tradition of the *poètes maudits* or the artists at odds with society. It may be a source of bitter-sweet pride to us that a few highly reputed Jewish writers were guilty of appallingly anti-social behaviour. Elias Canetti was dubbed the 'Hampstead monster' by Iris Murdoch's husband John Bailey, Arthur Koestler actually raped the wife of Michael Foot, and Norman Mailer (on a drug-induced 'trip') stabbed his own wife. Fortunately, the blade didn't penetrate very deeply, and the author of *The Naked and the Dead* acquired several unscarred wives subsequently.

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Austrian compensation fund eligibility extended

Michael Newman

Eligibility for payments from the Austrian Reconciliation Fund, established in November 2000 and endowed with €436 million (£300 million), has been extended to include Holocaust survivors who were forced to watch their close relatives scrubbing the streets as a measure of Nazi persecution in Vienna and other Austrian cities.

The Fund's remit is to 'make voluntary payments to former slave and forced labourers of the National Socialist regime on the territory of present-day Austria.' At the outset, its administrators estimated they would make payments to 150,000 Holocaust survivors worldwide. The Fund has already disbursed €284 million (some £198 million) to more than 109,000 Nazi victims. A total of 603 survivors living in Britain have shared almost €1.3million (around £900,000) in awards.

Applications to the Fund are divided into three categories: forced labour in agriculture and forestry or in the form of personal services (households,

hotels, etc.); forced labour in industry, business and construction including the railroads or postal services; and slave labour, work under inhumane conditions while under detention in a concentration camp-like place of confinement.

Completed applications to the Reconciliation Fund must be made by **31 December 2003**, although a letter stating an interest to submit a claim received by this date will be accepted as a registered application. (Survivors who have received payments from the German Slave and Forced Labour Compensation Programme - the Foundation: Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future - are not eligible to apply.)

For application forms, explanatory leaflets and further information, please contact P.O. Box 44, A-1011 Vienna. Their telephone number is 0043 1 513 60 16 and their fax number is 0043 1 513 60 16 15. Details of how to apply are also available on the Fund's website: www.reconciliationfund.at



At Jubilee House, Stanmore, the second floor has rapidly become operational as AJR's new head office, having been transferred to north London after many years in the traditional German-speaking heartland of Swiss Cottage and the Finchley Road. Situated adjacent to the Jubilee Line Underground station, these smart and well-designed offices are readily accessible to members and convenient for the social work team to make client visits, while being just some 50 minutes travel to and from Central London. (The Day Centre at Cleve Road, in West Hampstead, remains unaffected by the move.)

Arts and Events Diary December

All month 'A Storm in Europe: Bála Kádár, Hugó Scheiber and "Der Sturm" Gallery in Berlin'. Ben Uri Art Gallery, 108a Boundary Road, London NW8 tel 020 7604 3991

To 11 April 2004 'Women and War'. A major international exhibition looking at the role of women from the First World War to the present day. Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 tel 020 7416 5320

Mon 1 Hans Seelig, 'Bicentenary of Hector Berlioz'. Club 43

Tue 2 Vilem Tausky, renowned conductor and composer, reminisces with Michael Haas. London Jewish Cultural Centre (LJCC), 7.30 pm

Thur 4 *Nowhere in Africa*: Stephanie Zweig will be speaking about and showing clips from this award-winning film, based on her own experiences as a child. LJCC, 7.30 pm

Mon 8 Michael Faulkner, 'The Fate of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR, 1943-52'. Club 43

Tues 9 Jews and Black Culture: From Al Jolson to Ali G. Lecture by Dr Keith Kahn Harris. LJCC, 7.30 pm

Thur 11 'German Jewish Identities at the Margins: 100 Years of Central European Jewry, 1889-1989'. Lecture by Professor Sander Gillman. LJCC, 7.30 pm

Mon 15 'ChanuMas' get-together with refreshments and music. Club 43

To Thur 18 David Bomberg (1890-1957). An exhibition of works for sale on paper and paintings from 1914 to 1953. LJCC. 10 am to 5 pm Monday to Thursday

ORGANISATION CONTACTS

Club 43 Belsize Square Synagogue. Meetings 7.45 pm. Contact Hans Seelig tel 01442 254360

London Jewish Cultural Centre King's College, Kidderpore Avenue, London NW3 tel 020 7431 0345

200th anniversary of Bremen Jewish community

Lottie Levy



PHOTO: RONALD CHANNING

Lazarus Sheridan recapturing his days behind a school desk at Jews' Free School, Bell Lane, in London's East End, where he was a pupil from 1925 to 1930. Having served in the army during World War II, he returned to education and became head of schools in Stoke Newington and Westminster. The Jewish Museum's new exhibition, 'Faith in Education', relates the history of the school which, having been bombed out of Bell Lane during the blitz, was re-opened on a site near Camden Town in 1958, transferring only this year to a splendid ultra-modern building in Kenton. David Milliband, Minister of State for Education, who opened the exhibition, spoke of the school as being 'all that is good about education.' Lord Levy, President of JFS, introduced former head Mrs Jo Wagerman OBE and today's head, Dame Ruth Robbins. Kenneth Rubens and Rickie Burman welcomed everyone on behalf of the Jewish Museum.

The exhibition, at the Jewish Museum, Camden Town, will run until 29 February 2004.

Ronald Channing

A letter from a friend in Bremen, my old home-town, arrived in July informing me of a planned celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Jewish community there. I was asked if I would like to come and see the exhibition portraying the history of the Jewish community in the old Hanseatic town and to attend some of the many planned lectures, discussions, musical performances and - especially - a reception with speeches by Professor Brenner of Munich University, the local rabbi and the *Bürgermeister*, with whom I had corresponded since a previous visit. I decided to go for four days.

My grandfather had been a Hebrew teacher in Bremen from 1861 to 1873 - later he was the *Gemeinde-Vorsteher*. My father had officiated as rabbi following the departure of the last rabbi in 1939 until he and my mother were deported to Minsk with the remaining Jews of Bremen. I myself left Bremen as a Kindertransportee.

**'In 1945 there were
barely 100 Jews
in Bremen, while now
the community has
grown to almost 2,000'**

The events and exhibition, held in the lower town hall, had been planned with great care and attention to detail. There were panels of pictures of the earliest families permitted to settle in the town and lists of the names and life stories of many who had perished. Evocative audios and videos related

the stories of Bremen survivors of the Holocaust, showing shops and buildings and the destroyed synagogue. In 1945 there were barely 100 Jews in Bremen, while now the community has grown to almost 2,000, due mostly to immigration from Eastern Europe. There is a new synagogue, a community centre, a crèche, a women's union and a choir - a thriving and creative community.

I was greeted most cordially by the designer of the celebration and exhibition and asked to participate in a discussion with another ex-Kindertransportee. It was daunting, but very moving, to be asked about events which had taken place so long ago - and the questions kept coming. I was touched when we were applauded at the end of the discussion.

There were some interesting speakers and a lively and enjoyable evening of Yiddish music and songs. The reception in the town hall was a particular highlight.

Throughout my four days in Bremen I was impressed by the friendliness and interest of the people I met - not all of them Jewish. It made me feel glad to have been able to be there, to have met some good human beings, and to strengthen my belief and hope for the future.

KINDER HISTORY BOOK

The book by Barry Turner
And the Policeman Smiled,
a history of the
Kindertransport published
by World Jewish Relief,
is being sought by
the AJR office.

Please contact
Ronald Channing on
0208 385 3070/71

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor reserves the right
to shorten correspondence
submitted for publication

APOLOGY DEMANDED

Sir - I am a regular reader of the *AJR Journal* and particularly enjoy, although I do not always agree with, your comments on the political scene. However, after having been persecuted for 2000 years, no Jew can make racial/religious accusations, in particular the editor of a Jewish journal.

In my opinion, it would therefore be appropriate for you to issue an apology with regard to any such statements you may have published in the past.

*H Edward Levy
London SW1*

I am disinclined to make the suggested apology. As to racial accusations, you probably have in mind my phrase 'in as far as Arabs are amenable to reason' (Editorial, June 2003). This appeared at a time when the Palestinians faced the choice between President Arafat and Prime Minister Abu Mazen as their chief spokesman. The former had destroyed hopes of an accord at Camp David - and the latter was the author of a doctoral dissertation denying the Holocaust.

Concerning religious accusations, I have certainly criticised both Christianity (especially Catholicism) and Islam. The Roman Church has depicted Jews as Christ-killers throughout history right up to Vatican II. Admittedly, Islam merely condescended to us till the 1920s, since when the Mufti of Jerusalem, the Muslim Brotherhood and Ayatollah Khomeini have engendered a tidal wave of Judeophobia - Ed.

CLAIMS CONFERENCE

Sir - The article in two parts by David Rothenberg (September and October issues) was most interesting and timely in that it has now been announced that the Claims Conference is scheduled to wind down its activities. I consider

them neither benefactors nor villains. It is just that they would have appeared to have taken the easy way out before shutting up shop.

The easy way was to concentrate on reclaiming the value of Jewish properties and fixed assets. Even there the Claims Conference found themselves in controversy and faced accusations of interfering where not wanted. There are, however, still at least two areas where little, if anything, has been done to reclaim substantial values from the German government.

These are the recovery of the equivalent of some 30 billion Reichsmark, namely the proceeds of the so-called AKTION 3, and the recovery of the iniquitous 'Judensteuer' levied on Jewish citizens following Kristallnacht. The amount involved was 1 billion Goldmark at that time.

Writing to the Claims Conference draws a totally meaningless response accompanied by a glossy brochure - almost like communicating with a mail order company. The organisation was set up to recover the value of all assets confiscated, stolen, sequestered and otherwise illegally acquired by the Germans from Jews in the period 1933-45. This they have failed to do. There is a justified feeling that their activities show a lack of clarity and transparency. Opaqueness to the point of blackness seems to be the order of the day.

*Herbert Haberberg
Barnet*

ASSISTING TODAY'S REFUGEES

Sir - In your October letters section Ms Cohn asks: 'Have AJR members any knowledge and experience on how to assist present-day refugees in their locality?'

Marom, the young adult department of the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, has undertaken a major project to train 16 mentors to work

with young people arriving here as refugees, often with no family or personal contacts in this country. The project aims to help this vulnerable group by offering experience and skills to help them face challenges with confidence. Members of Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue, where the project originated, will be supporting the project by being trained to assist with the immigration process.

If Ms Cohn or any other reader would like more information they can direct enquiries to Clare Hedwat, Marom Projects Co-ordinator, by telephone on 020 8201 8772 ext 203.

*Richard Wolfe
London NW1*

Sir - Exiled Writers Ink! www.exiledwriters.co.uk works with and for refugee and exiled writers in educational, creative, performance, academic, awareness-raising and dialogue fields. Those involved in the organisation are mainly current refugees and other interested people who include a number of second-generation children of Continental refugees, including myself.

We would be very interested in devising a programme whereby current and ex-refugees read narratives and poems and talk to a range of organisations.

*Jennifer Langer
London NW11*

Sir - I am one of the lucky 669 children whom Sir Nicholas Winton managed to get out of Czechoslovakia to England on the children's transports in 1939. For every single one of us he had to find a sponsor who would guarantee to look after us until the age of 17, having also paid £50 for future repatriation - a large sum of money considering the average yearly wage was then £500. Not one of us was allowed to be a burden on the English tax-payer. If he had not had this stipulation to meet he would have been able to rescue many more children. Even the 10,000 children who were allowed to enter this country on transports after Kristallnacht were taken care of by voluntary organisations and charitable individuals. Not one of them was a burden on the UK tax-payer. The older children were given work and many

were sent to Canada and Australia.

Nor could adults enter the country without either a job to come to or a sponsor. My parents would not have perished in Auschwitz had they been able to meet these requirements.

The English public is as generous and welcoming to genuine refugees as ever: what they object to is economic migrants and spongers. We did not come here seeking free handouts and we did not burn down accommodation provided for us at great expense. We were grateful to be safe and free and we settled down to be hard-working and law-abiding UK citizens.

Bronia Snow
Surrey

ALL PASSION SPENT

Sir - Following on from your October editorial, you might be interested to know that I am one of Diana Mosley's grandsons and that I married a daughter of a Kindertransport child (Hans-Adolf Isenthal) in 1990. Naturally we didn't share her politics. She and my wife had no problems with each other, though initially I thought that they wouldn't get on.

Our four children were made welcome in Diana's Paris flat without any lingering antisemitism on my granny's part. While Diana's politics and views are incomprehensible to us, she did not actually kill anyone.

My father-in-law has been too hurt and is too proud to claim compensation for his family's deaths and property losses in Berlin. His father, Rafael Isenthal, was sent to Terezin and then finally to Auschwitz at the end of 1944. With best wishes for the work you do.

Patrick Guinness

MISPLACED SYMPATHY

Sir - Unlike Mr Goldberg (October issue), I think the bombing of Dresden resulted from the sowing of the wind by the Luftwaffe on 7 September 1940. From Dresden to the end of the war were 81 long days for those on death marches.

Even 73 days after Dresden, or 8 days before the surrender, 2,775 Jews from Rehmsdorff near Buchenwald were being marched towards Theresianstadt. Only 500 reached the ghetto alive. Killing Jews remained a priority until the very last moment.

As to the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, why did so many Germans flee from the Russians? Could it have been a case of bad conscience? Do Herr Grass and his fellow revisionists not mix up cause and effect?

Frank Bright
Ipswich

REMNANTS

Sir - I recently visited Berncastel-Cues, a small town on the Mosel well-known for wine-producing and a tourist spot due to its attractive medieval centre. I tried to trace remnants of bygone Jewish life. In the old town, I found a narrow, stepped passageway clearly marked 'Zur alten Synagoge.' I walked up (it must have been quite an effort for elderly people to attend services) and found the old synagogue building now being used for other purposes. Obviously, it was not destroyed by fire due to the proximity of other houses. I found a plaque on the wall of the last remaining city gates in memory of their Jewish citizens dated 1988 (they took their time over this).

I also visited the Jewish cemetery, about one mile outside the town, in the midst of vineyards overlooking the river. I am pleased to report that it was in good order: all gravestones were upright and the grass was being cut. This might interest readers from neighbouring parts of Germany.

FH Edwards
London N2

VOLTE-FACE

Sir - The Germans refuse to go to war, writes Mr M Goldenberg (September issue). If that is the case, do they have an army for display purposes only? I was always of the opinion that abolishing the *Parademarsch* would emasculate them as a fighting force.

Ernest G Kolman
Greenford, Middx

CORRECTION

Sir - The deplorable Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (October editorial) was never a cardinal. Incidentally, you might have added that he and his followers were excommunicated.

Francis Steiner
Deddington, Oxon

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ART NOTES

Gloria Tessler

When you grow dizzy from watching **Olafur Eliasson's** vaporous sun and its recumbent sun-gazers on the floor of **Tate Modern**, you can take the clipper along the Thames to **Tate Britain**. Sailing past the House of Commons at the precise moment the sun was setting on Ian Duncan Smith's leadership of the Tory Party, the link seemed ironic. Turner's milky, yet dazzling sunsets are legendary, but the four artists short-listed for that most prestigious prize in his name have more than something of the night about them. In fact, they seem to have been selected for their preoccupation with death and putrefaction.



Because Nothing Has Changed,
Anya Gallaccio 2002

Anya Gallaccio casts a tree in bronze on which she strings luscious red apples in their full prime. She sandwiches 800 red gerbera daisies with their long green stalks between huge panes of glass. But, no doubt before the judging panel decides between her and her fellow competitors, the fruit will wither and die and the stench of rotting vegetation will fill the gallery. Gallaccio sees her art as both performance and collaboration and likes to work with organic things such as chocolate, sugar, flowers and candles to convey the organic

process of eternal change.

Willie Doherty roots his art in daily life in Northern Ireland. His video *Re-Run 2002* comprises two opposite screens, showing a man running towards you and away from you. The man in flight makes no progress and is therefore doomed to run for ever. He is caught in the metaphor of a bridge, which in Northern Ireland implies the urban terror from which two warring factions find no escape. The unbridgeable gap which exercises this artist derives from the imagery and language of tabloid journalism and television reportage.

Then there is the satirical eye of **Grayson Perry** - for me the most original artist here - with his elaborately painted urns and his elaborate 'coming-out dress', which reflects the artist's transvestite *alter ego* Claire. The beautiful pottery - a symbol of domestic refinement - confuses the eye, however, as its real intention is to convey Perry's obsession with brutal paedophilia, often based on Greek or Victorian sources, in which children seem both etherealised and victimised. Perry engraves the pottery with the tragic graffiti of child abuse or murder.

Jake and Dinos Chapman, famed for their sexually mutant child mannequins, have vandalised Goya's *Disasters of War* by superimposing clownish faces on the master's stricken subjects. Comparing sex to death, their *pièce de résistance*, *Sex 2003*, is a tree hung with decaying, butchered skeletons, spiders, maggots and flies.

This presumptive, self-proclamatory art is the legacy of Damian Hirst's maggoty cows and von Hagens's plastinated corpses. In other words, it develops from an artistic tradition sanctioned by the art world. Art says most when it leaves the viewer a window in which to express his or her own private response. What response can you offer to such overt brutality?

RG's INTERFACE

USA Among the German Jewish exhibits currently on display at New York's Jewish Museum are a video installation devoted to Arnold Schönberg's opera *Erwartung* and a painting by Frida Kahlo entitled *My Grandparents, My Parents and I*. Kahlo, the subject of a recent critically acclaimed film, was Mexican-born but had a German Jewish father. The painting, executed in the stylised form of a family tree, shows that as early as 1936 the artist felt apprehensive about the fate of her relatives.

Germany (a) Films of Jewish interest shown at the Berlinale included Istvan Szabo's *Der Fall Furtwängler* (based on Ronald Harwood's *Taking Sides*), Costa Gavra's *Stellvertreter* (based on Hochhuth), and Bertrand Tavernier's *Laissez-Passer*. (b) The East German Jewish writer Stefan Heym was a communist with a *penchant* for dissidence. In an interview, his widow pointed up another ambiguity in his makeup: while making Jewish characters like King David, Ferdinand Lassalle and Karl Radek the heroes of his historical novels, he left instructions that his tombstone in the Weissensee Jewish cemetery should not have the Star of David engraved on it.

(c) On the occasion of the centenary of Ernst Bloch, the author of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, a study of utopianism, the Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt has published a biography of the dissident Marxist philosopher by Arno Münster.

Austria (a) During the 2003 summer season the Reichenau Festival premiered *Therese*, a play based on Arthur Schnitzler's eponymous 1920s novel about a single mother (with Marisa Hörbiger in the lead). The festival also staged Schnitzler's exposé of antisemitic bigotry, *Professor Bernhardi*, as well as a dramatised version of the author's *Traumnovelle* - known worldwide as *Eyes Wide Shut* in Stanly Kubrick's film version. (b) Three young Viennese theatre enthusiasts have founded an Armin Berg Gesellschaft to keep the memory of the great Jewish cabaret artist alive.

Britain AJR member Lotte Kramer's poem *Exodus* has been displayed on the capital's Tube trains as part of the 'Poems on the Underground' scheme.

Waltzing on Vesuvius

TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS

National Theatre

Odon von Horvath chose the title for this play with deliberate satiric intent. In his view, the tales had as little to do with romance as the catch phrase 'the golden-hearted Viennese' denoted generosity of spirit, or *die schöne blaue Donau* described the true colour of the eponymous river.

Horvath located the action of the play in Vienna's Eighth District, an area populated by petty-bourgeois shopkeepers and civil servants. Three adjacent shops - a tobacconist's, a butcher's and a toy shop - form the backdrop to the action. The tobacconist, a hardboiled peroxidized widow *d'un certain âge* sends her lover, the work-shy chancer Alfred, packing, whereupon the latter sets his cap at the toy shop-owner's daughter. Immature Marianne breaks off her engagement to the staid butcher next door and sets up home with Alfred without benefit of clergy. When a child comes along Alfred dispatches it to the salubrious air of his peasant grandmother's smallholding.

Hereafter the frequently humorous and folksy tone of the play darkens inexorably - till at curtain fall the jilted butcher forces the grief-stricken near-catatonic Marianne into a reconciliation.

The Strauss waltz Horvath chose as his title may have been kitschy, but the play is an absolute Kitschbuster which delivers repeated blows to the audience's solar plexus. These are, however, interspersed with a series of rib-tickling and, at the same time bitter-sweet, set pieces: a children's picnic, a bathing contest, a band performance, a convivial 'Heurigen' and a *louche* cabaret.

At the play's end, with the 1,000-strong audience's applause ringing in my ear, I remembered the generally lukewarm critical reception of this production. I would urge readers not to be put off by the nay-sayers. *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, premiered by Max Reinhardt in Berlin in 1931 (with Peter Lorre as Alfred) will, I am sure, still be performed in its centenary year.

Richard Grunberger

REVIEWS

Cross-section of German society

MANJA: A NOVEL ABOUT FIVE CHILDREN

Anna Gmeyner

Persephone Books, 2003, £10

The Weimar Republic opened the road to success to groups like women and Jews, who had been denied equal access before 1918, and nowhere more so than in literature. Consequently, Hitler's accession to power caused a substantial exodus from Germany and Austria of highly talented Jewish women writers who had made their breakthrough before emigrating to Britain. One thinks of Hilde Spiel, later a 'grande dame' of Austrian letters, of the success enjoyed by Ruth Feiner's novels before her untimely death, of Elisabeth Castonier, and of Gabriele Tergit, an author prominent in the AJR and the German PEN Club in exile.

Anna Gmeyner, born in Vienna in 1902, has undeservedly fallen into obscurity. She made her name as a writer in Berlin before 1933, and her best-known novel, *Manja*, was published in 1938 by Querido, one of the Amsterdam publishing houses that favoured refugee writers. Though an English translation was published by Secker and Warburg in 1939 to excellent reviews, Gmeyner then largely disappeared from view. The novel was republished in Germany in 1984, and it is greatly to the credit of Persephone Books that this new English translation has now appeared.

Manja is the story of five children, all conceived on the same night, who become friends despite the differing social backgrounds and political views of their families. At the novel's centre is Manja, the little Polish Jewish girl with a magical ability to bring happiness, who is driven to suicide by Nazi brutality. Like a number of contemporary novels about German society - Anna Seghers's *The Seventh Cross* is the most famous -

Manja depicts a broad cross-section of German society in order to analyse the reactions of various social groups to Nazism, from staunch communists and good-hearted liberals to crassly opportunistic Nazis. The novel is powerfully written, though occasionally heavily emotional, its view of German society is incisive, and its story is well worth the purchase price.

Anthony Grenville

A tale of quest and adventure

SOMEONE TO RUN WITH

David Grossman

translated by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz

Bloomsbury, 2003, £10.99

A story that brings Jerusalem to life but leaves Arab-Israeli politics on a backburner might seem somewhat unusual these days, especially when the author, David Grossman, is also a respected commentator and journalist. But in his recent novel, *Someone to Run With*, Grossman gives leave to his imagination to create a tale of quest and adventure.

Sixteen-year-old Assaf, on a holiday job at City Hall, is charged with returning a stray dog to her owner. The long rope connecting the boy and Dinka, the dog, serves as a skilful metaphor to draw the reader into the labyrinthine strands of the absorbing narrative, set against Jerusalem's subculture of drugs and petty crime. In the course of his quest, Assaf loses much of his adolescent gaucheness and can be seen to assume the mythological qualities of the knight pursuing the Holy Grail.

Certainly, he has to remain single-minded. For the dog's owner, Tamar, also 16 and a talented singer, has disappeared on a quest of her own, to rescue someone only identified as 'Shai'. Although many reviewers have revealed his connection to Tamar, this information is withheld until much later, one instance of the economy in eking out nuggets of background information with which Grossman, a master storyteller, enables the reader to experience the vicissitudes of the

unknown through which his central characters are destined to travel.

To find Shai, Tamar, a female Orpheus, is obliged to penetrate an underworld where young street artists are plied with their narcotic fixes and milked for their talent. Blocking her way is a massive brute, Grossman's version of Pluto and Cerberus, the ironically-named Pesach. But to enter hell, she must first attract the attention of Shai's captors, and this she does by singing in many of Jerusalem's streets and squares. Grossman captures in loving detail her lyrical voice and the joys and struggles integral to the act of singing.

Each venue is encapsulated in Grossman's richly varied prose, the most memorable being Zion Square at night, pulsating with performing artists, colourful stalls and a retinue of white-clad Breslev Chassids chanting mystical songs, a scene so vibrantly conveyed I felt I was watching it on video. Equally arresting are various personalities Tamar and Assaf encounter. These include Tamar's friend in hell, the tragically self-destructive green-haired Sheli, and two stalwarts from her previous incarnation to whom Assaf is led by the wise and virtually human Dinka.

Leah is the outwardly abrasive restaurant owner, with a soft and compassionate centre, while Theodora, a cameo-character of striking originality, is a tiny, wizened nun from the sunken island of Lyxos, who fortuitously avoided death by being dispatched, aged 12, to preside over a convent in the Holy City where pilgrims are awaited but never arrive.

The convent is one unfamiliar locale Assaf is taken to. Another, a village abandoned by Arabs in 1948 and now occupied by Russian squatters, raises the political questions the novel prefers to eschew. Assaf recalls the arguments his left-leaning sister used to have with her former boyfriend. Reli, the sister, has now left Israel for America, needing 'space', a contemporary state of affairs likely to become more common with no solution to the Israel/Palestine situation in prospect.

Emma Klein

The Stasi's greatest coup

DEMOCRACY

Michael Frayn

Cottesloe Theatre, London

The appointment of Willy Brandt, a man of the left, as German chancellor in 1969 was a turning point in postwar history. For the previous 20 years West Germany's conservative governments had striven to lock their country into a Western alliance while keeping relations with the East, including the DDR, in a deep freeze. Willy Brandt set out to change all that, and his transparent sincerity and proven democratic record thawed frozen attitudes on both sides of the Iron Curtain. His visit to East Germany was an enormous crowd-puller, but he forbore to address the adoring multitudes lest any words of his ignited a spark that might turn into a conflagration. (Little did he know that within two decades the Berlin Wall would collapse.) Another great, wordless gesture of his occurred, on a trip to Poland, when he dropped to his knees at the site of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Yet all the time, while the Chancellor was engaged in this ground-breaking activity, a Soviet mole ensconced in his office transmitted government secrets to the East German spy-master Misha Wolff. What enabled the endlessly obliging Günter Guillaume to worm his way into Brandt's confidence was their shared lowly background and fatherless upbringing. After several years West German intelligence 'fingered' and arrested Guillaume, and the ensuing scandal abruptly ended Willy Brandt's career.

Michael Frayn has taken this episode from recent German history as the subject matter for his play *Democracy*, which is currently attracting a capacity audience. The danger attendant on such a historical fact-based enterprise is that the end result may turn out less drama than documentary. For all his well-honed skill as a dramatist, Frayn has not entirely avoided that pitfall. Part of the time the audience eavesdrops on urgent discussions between the idealistic Brandt, his ex-Communist mentor Herbert Wehner, his pragmatic successor Helmut Schmidt and others, about such arcane

issues as whether they should go into coalition with the Liberal FDP or the Conservative CDU or try to govern alone. Frayn intersperses these with internal monologues by Brandt mawkishly wondering about what has become of his youthful self.

This bare outline of the play's content and style does not, on its own, make it appear a 'must see' event. What lifts it into a different dimension, however, is the direction by Michael Blakemore, the set designed by Peter J Davison, and the ensemble acting of the cast of ten.

Yet nagging doubts remain. Frayn's Brandt is hardly a tragic hero whose downfall stems from a flaw in his own character. A dozen years ago the thesis underlying David Hare's state-of-the-Labour Party play *The Absence of War* was that idealism cannot co-exist with the exercise of power. If Frayn has avoided drawing this facile conclusion, Tony Blair's premiership may have had something to do with it.

Richard Grunberger

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Eric Sanders was born Ignaz Schwarz into a Jewish family eking out a living from a grocer's shop on a Viennese council estate. At Realschule his classmates called him 'Nazi' - a diminutive of Ignaz - while routinely beating him up as a 'Jewboy'. Eventually, he learned to hit back. He compensated for indifferent progress at school by honing his rudimentary pianistic skills, fondly envisaging a future in Tin Pan Alley. He also spent much time at the Maccabi club house, while his younger brother joined Betar.

After the Anschluss the latter left, illegally, for Palestine; the rest of the family came to England. Here, Eric worked first as a messenger boy at Bloomsbury House, then as a farm labourer. Early in 1940 he joined the Pioneer Corps, and within months found himself in France. After the German breakthrough his company was the last to be evacuated from St Malo.

Back in England news of his father's internment awaited him. More dramatically, he and his unit had to dig trenches for troops preparing to repel the apparently imminent invasion. Only weeks later they were billeted to an East End school assigned to clearing debris from the incessantly bombed London docks. Their subsequent chores comprised somewhat less dangerous manual labour: tree-felling, road-building and the construction of Nissen huts on army camps.

Halfway through the war Eric volunteered for the Austrian special unit engendered by the SOE in pursuance of Churchill's directive 'Set Europe Ablaze.' He underwent commando-style training, received instruction as a radio operator, and was flown to Italy.

By coincidence, his brother, a volunteer in the Jewish Brigade, was also in Italy. The two arranged to meet - but, en route to the meeting place, his brother died in a car crash.

PROFILE

Richard Grunberger

Eric Sanders

Restitution after 67 years



For Eric this trauma was followed by a period of intense frustration. Although some Special Force colleagues - see Walter Freud's article in *AJR Information*, June 1994 - were being dropped behind enemy lines, his own turn hadn't come when the Austrian front collapsed.

After VE Day Eric was posted back to Blighty, where he acted as interpreter and editor of the camp newspaper in a PoW camp. Finally, still in uniform, he spent a year in Vienna as a translator attached to the British-Austrian Legal Unit. Demobbed, he went to an Emergency Teachers' Training College (where he met his wife). Over the years he rose through the ranks of the profession to become first master in a large comprehensive school. He retired at the age of 61. Proud of the fitness acquired in the army, even as a retiree he would go back to his last school for weekly football games with ex-colleagues half his age. Hubris provoked nemesis: a bare year into his retirement, a footballing accident robbed him of

the sight in his left eye.

However, this impairment has not cramped Eric's style. Busy both in politics and the arts, he has been short-listed for a Euro parliamentary candidacy, composed *Emil and the Detectives* as a school musical, translated several Grillparzer plays, read short stories on LBC radio, and contributed German-language articles to a journal called *Links Europa*.

In the course of his forays into the arts, Eric made contact with a London-domiciled Arab film producer. This chance encounter led to the most exotic episode in Eric's life: he was asked to write the script for a documentary film about the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser. Preparatory to writing the screen-play, he had to undertake a great deal of research. Nor was that all. During the actual filming, Eric and his wife Margaret were flown to Cairo, where, in the near-palatial setting of the British embassy, he impersonated HM Ambassador involved in the Suez crisis - and Margaret, the latter's spouse. (At this point in the interview, Eric quipped: 'Imagine an Austrian yid playing *Our Man in Cairo!*')

On a recent visit to Vienna, Eric talked at length to the staff of his old school, where a plaque to former Jewish pupils is about to be unveiled. He also subsequently met the director of the nearby *Volkshochschule* (adult education college). The latter was so impressed with Eric's life-story that he scheduled a special event next March, at which the octogenarian will read literary excerpts and compositions. Since the latter include songs intended for a musical which had every prospect of being staged at the Theater an der Wien during the 1937/38 season, one could describe the up-coming 'one-man show' as restitution after 67 years.

INSIDE the AJR

Bradford 'Continental Friends'

Our meeting, the first of Holocaust survivors in Bradford, was organised by AJR Northern Groups' Co-ordinator Susanne Green, attended by about 16 people, and held at the Bradford Hebrew Congregation Synagogue. Each person spoke for a few moments on who they were and why they were attending the meeting. This was followed by an interesting discussion with memories being reawakened. All present were delighted that such a meeting had been held and, indeed, regretted that it had not been held before.

Albert Waxman

Next meeting: mid-January 2004, to be confirmed

Ilford shaping up well

Twenty-three people turned up at our third meeting to hear Michael Rosen from the Israeli Embassy give us an update on the situation in the Middle East. There was a lively discussion and the vote of thanks was given by Rolf Perias. The group is shaping up well and there is already a feeling of permanence among those attending.

Meta Roseneil

Next meeting: Wednesday 17 December at 10.30 am: Walter Woyda on 'The Rothschilds - The Musical'

UK Jewish Film Festival discussed by Brighton & Hove Sarid

At her annual, very welcome visit, Judy Ironside said the UK Jewish Film Festival was no longer confined to Brighton but would be visiting several cities in the UK. Although obviously Jewish themes are predominant, other subjects are being tackled and films from eight other countries (including Australia, Canada, Germany and India) are being shown. A discussion highlighting how Jewish practices differ according to their mostly European



South London members given a tour of the Cabinet War Rooms by James Taylor

origins provided interesting insight into the background of those present.

Next meeting: Monday 22 December at 10.45 am: Chanukah Party

Hull praises recent get-togethers

We met at a member's house, where Susanne Green gave us updates on other AJR groups and developments and distributed the 2004 St Annes' holiday literature. A review of the recent London day out and of the subsequent Leeds get-together revealed great satisfaction from all participants. All four Kindertransport members expressed interest in a possible visit to Liverpool Street Station in London.

Bob Rosner

Next meeting: Sunday 1 February 2004 at the home of Erika Sykes in Brough

North London: 'Happiness is an attitude of mind'

This was the title of a talk by Bettine Le Beau. Her background in showbiz, clay modelling and film work made her a jolly and entertaining speaker and she had her audience of 23 rocking with laughter. For me, and for most of us, a good deal of what she said - 'Look on the positive side in all things!' for instance - rang true.

Eric Adler

Next meeting: Thursday 18 December, 10.30 am. Chanukah Party

Essex in tune

We extended our heartfelt condolences to one of our members at the recent loss of his wife after a long illness. David Ball then played for us various tunes on his keyboard. We much enjoyed the 'Warsaw Concerto', after which there

was a change of mood with 'Kiss Me Good Night, Sergeant Major', with all our former soldiers joining in excitedly in the singing. It was the same with 'Lily Marlene', although the voices did not quite compete with that of Marlene Dietrich.

Julie Franks

Next meeting: Tuesday 9 December, 11 am

South London outing to Cabinet War Rooms

On a visit to the Cabinet War Rooms, we were met by James Taylor, who gave us a most interesting and informative tour. I had never been there before and did not realise that there was so much to see and learn. We are very grateful to James Taylor for giving up his time on a busy day.

Herbert Wolff

Next meeting

Wessex (Bournemouth) Wednesday 17 December. Chanukah Party + Quiz

Summer in November in Bournemouth

We all had to cast off our woollies and enjoy the sun. It was unbelievable and wonderful. We were taken to see the town of Dorchester on its market day and to Swanage on our way back to Bournemouth. Richard, our driver, is a very knowledgeable guide and he kept us informed on the local history. Thanks again to our Good Trinity: Carol, Sylvia and Annie!

**Hana Nermut
Harrow**



PHOTO: RONALD CHANNING

Ralph Blumenau addressed AJR Luncheon Club on 'Jewish Medicine in Germany'



Meeting up Down Under: Former AJR members Claire Mair, left, and Susan Chotzen have been brought together by AJR Day Centre Manager Sylvia Matus. Sylvia put Susan, who visited Australia to see her son, in touch with Claire, who emigrated several years ago. The two had never met in England. 'This is what AJR is all about!', said Sylvia.

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FAMILY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Deaths

Feist. Erna Alice, née Silbermann, born in Frankfurt/Main in 1898, died peacefully in London 3 September 2003, one week after her 105th birthday. Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by her daughters, Margrit Bishop and Alix Markson, her sons-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nephew and many friends. She was a special lady.

Goddard. Eva Goddard, loving and much loved wife of Walter, passed away on 14 October. Missed and always remembered by all who knew her.

Levy. John. We regret to announce the unexpected death on 22 October of John Levy, aged 64, of Norman Court. Much missed by his sister Elizabeth and her family, Kurt and Renate Treitel and his other cousins, and Barbara, his long-term friend.

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Obituaries

Dr Frank Falk

Dr Frank Falk, who died shortly before his 96th birthday, played a major role in the Jewish refugee community and the AJR.

Born in Düsseldorf, he gained a doctorate in law from Bonn University. Being banned from practising law by the Nazi authorities, he became a Jewish communal official, ending up as director of the Palestine Office in Hamburg. In November 1938 he was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, but later released to organise German-Jewish emigration, remaining in Germany until June 1939.

Arriving in the UK, he organised passages to Palestine for some of the 3,000 refugees in the Kitchner camp. On the outbreak of war he volunteered for the British Army, serving in the Pioneer Corps, later transferring to the Intelligence Corps. In 1940 he married Lilo Kaufmann. Following demobilisation, as his legal qualifications were not recognised in England, he studied accountancy and qualified as a chartered accountant, joined a city firm and became a taxation specialist.

One of the earliest members of the AJR, his knowledge both of German law and British accountancy made him uniquely qualified to pursue restitution, compensation and pension claims on behalf of thousands of refugee clients, particularly in the critical period from 1950 to 1975. By bombarding MPs and the Inland Revenue with relevant information, he was the key individual concerned in obtaining full exemption from taxation on such payments from the Inland Revenue. Due to his efforts, all

categories of payment are now tax-free and the recipients enjoy the full benefit.

Dr Falk served as AJR Vice-Chairman for many years and was known to many members for his help, advice and kindness. He was a member of the AJR Charitable Trust and he wrote many expert articles for *AJR Information* and even in retirement he continued to provide advice and help.

He also served as Joint Chairman of the worldwide Council of Jews from Germany, while his further offices encompassed a wide range: from several years' membership of the Board of Deputies to the chairmanship of the Association of New British (that is, refugee) Ex-Servicemen. In between, there was Leo Baeck College, the Theodor Herzl Society and Belsize Square Synagogue. He was a past president of the Leo Baeck B'nai B'rith Lodge, a member of the B'nai B'rith executive for many years and one of its only two honorary life members.

Dr Falk entered the Otto Schiff Housing Association residential homes with his wife Lilo, who died in 1998, where he spent his last years.

Manfred Vanson

Like many of those who were forced to flee Germany just before the Second World War, Manfred Vanson sought to contribute to the society which had given him shelter.

He was born in Hamburg in 1916 and escaped to England following Kristallnacht. In 1940, together with his young wife, Frances (née Hirsch), he undertook the care of 25 Kindertransport children in a hostel in Hampstead. At the same time, he began working in the

Jewish Blind Society, then a small organisation providing financial assistance to visually impaired Jews. After the war the JBS became Manfred's life-work and vocation and, during the subsequent 40 years and as its director, he built it up to constitute an exemplary communal organisation, raising funds, establishing residential homes, holiday homes and day centres and helping blind members of the Jewish community. He was awarded the OBE when he retired in 1980.

Manfred, aided by Frances, was a mainstay of the Jewish community of Kingsbury, helping to make it one of the most vibrant and fastest-growing London congregations. His unique charm, sharp mind and innate modesty won him the affection of a wide range of people. He dispensed charity, both overtly and covertly, and earned the undying gratitude of many people, both in England and in Israel.

Following Manfred's retirement he and Frances moved to Israel, to be near their children and grandchildren. In these 20 years he continued to pursue his efforts on behalf of the community, assuming an active role in the English-speaking B'nai Brith Lodge in Jerusalem and serving as its president for two terms.

For most of his adult life Manfred served as an example of decency, kindness and unflagging dedication to helping those less fortunate than himself. Although his father and brother had died before the war, and his sister survived the war in France, his mother perished in Theresienstadt, to his lasting sorrow. He is survived by his three daughters, 18 grandchildren and 25 great-grandchildren.

Central Office for Holocaust Claims

Michael Newman

31 December 2003 deadlines

December is the final month for making applications to four compensation funds, which have all announced extensions to filing deadlines.

Insurance claims

To view the list of more than 400,000 names of insurance policy holders who later became victims of Nazi

persecution, please visit the website of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims: www.icheic.org.

The Council for the Compensation of Holocaust Victims in the Slovak Republic pays compensation to Holocaust victims (or their heirs) whose properties were aryanised during the Second World War. The Council can be reached at Kancelaria Rady, P.O. Box 115, 820 05 Bratislava 25, Slovak Republic. Its website is www.holocaustslovakia.sk and its email address is kancrada@stonline.sk.

Austrian National Fund payment

The Austrian government, through the office of the National Fund, makes a one-time lump sum award of AS 105,000 (approximately £4,500) to Austrian Nazi victims in respect of lost apartment and small business leases, household property and personal valuables and effects.

The Austrian Reconciliation Fund

See article on page 4.

Applications to the above funds cannot be accepted after 31 December 2003.

Letter from Israel Dorothea Shefer-Vanson



Dorothea Shefer-Vanson

Anyone opening the newspapers or watching the news in England or anywhere else tends to think that Israelis live in a perpetual state of tension, with people constantly being blown up on buses and in restaurants. For that reason many potential tourists, even Jews, who should know better, have refrained from visiting Israel in the last few years.

Although there is some truth in that view, it is far from being the whole picture. People get up in the morning and go to work or school in Israel much as they do anywhere else in the world (only the weather is usually better). Where I work there have always been guards at the entrance, but that is as much because of what the central bank contains as to preserve the lives of its employees. In the daytime people toil in offices and factories, shops and banks. In the evenings they can see alarming stories on television about riots in Bolivia, racism in the British police force, or any other news item that has been selected by editors to be given prominence that night.

News programmes must, by their nature, seize on terrible and unusual events in order to fill their hourly, daily or weekly slot or column inches. And terrorist attacks on civilians certainly fall into that category. Yet daily life in

Israel is quite different from the picture portrayed by scenes of shattered buses and screaming ambulances.

There are many aspects of life in Israel which are not given prominence but occupy an equally important place in the lives of people here. The cultural life of the major Israeli towns is comparable with that of any large European city. A plethora of concerts, exhibitions and plays cater for a wide range of tastes. There are currently at least three symphony orchestras offering concerts almost every night in Jerusalem, where I live, and many more chamber ensembles of various kinds. Numbers of people sing in choirs, participate in amateur dramatic societies, attend lectures or go to classes on any subject under the sun. The Hebrew professional theatre is flourishing, and plays are put on almost nightly in the Jerusalem and Khan Theatres. In addition to the Israel Museum, which provides permanent and changing exhibitions, museums and art galleries offer exhibitions to meet a variety of tastes. Cinemas and clubs provide another popular form of entertainment. Tel Aviv likes to think of itself as culturally more advanced than Jerusalem, and that may be true, but Jerusalem has certainly nothing to be ashamed of.

One outstanding cultural event is the Choral Music Festival held in the village of Abu Ghosh, just outside Jerusalem, three or four times a year. Most of the concerts are given in the church, which has excellent acoustics. The audience consists primarily of Jews but there is also a sprinkling of Christians and Muslims, all coming to listen to (mainly Christian) music. The church is situated in an Arab village whose denizens welcome patrons to their restaurants and cafes. This constitutes just one of those gems of coexistence which are more common in Israel than is generally believed, but which of course are not deemed newsworthy.

Newsround

German general dismissed

A letter of support from Brig. General Reinhard Günzel, commander of Germany's special forces, to MP Martin Hohmann has resulted in his dismissal by Defence Minister Peter Struck. Hohmann, who sits in opposition as a Christian Democrat, described Jews as 'perpetrators' - like Germans - since many Jews were Bolsheviks who had taken part in the Russian Revolution.

'St. Louis' letter discovered

A rare surviving letter written by a passenger on the ill-fated St. Louis, which sailed from Hamburg in 1939 with Jewish refugee passengers aboard, has been discovered. It pleads for Cuba's president to allow them to disembark. The ship was forced to return to Europe, where most of its passengers eventually lost their lives.

Oxford don suspended

Tel Aviv University PhD student Amit Duvshani was refused the opportunity to work in Professor Andrew Wilkie's laboratory at Oxford. The professor had a 'huge problem' with Israel's treatment of Palestinians and did not wish to take on 'somebody who had served in the Israeli army.' Following a university investigation, Prof Wilkie has been suspended for two months. Vice-Chancellor Sir Colin Lucas said 'he looked forward to applications from able candidates, whatever their background.'

Students to visit Germany

German Ambassador Thomas Matussek has offered to help teachers and Jewish students to experience modern Germany, as an addition to their Holocaust studies, by organising visits, reports the *Jewish Chronicle*. President Rau and others have expressed concern at many British youngsters' anti-German attitudes.

Vichy's handicapped victims

Most of the 50,000 mentally handicapped victims of Vichy France starved to death, according to an investigation carried out by academics in Lyon. However, there were no documents supporting a secret genocidal plan as implemented in Germany.