

# AJR journal

Association of Jewish Refugees

## Peoples, cars and people's cars

The 70th anniversary of the production in 1936 of the VW3, the prototype of the Volkswagen, underlies the historical irony that an industrial product so closely associated with National Socialism and Hitler personally should have become an icon of the anti-war left in 1960s America. Readers of a mawkish disposition will recall that it even metamorphosed into the 'Love Bug' in the Disney film *Herbie*.

In 1933 Hitler discussed with the engineer Ferdinand Porsche his idea of a Volkswagen, a people's car that could carry five people and cruise at 100 kph, was economical on fuel, and cost only 1,000 Reichsmark. Porsche's ideas for a small car dovetailed with Hitler's vision of a car available to all Germans and so the sturdy little Beetle with its air-cooled, rear-mounted engine was born.

But the cloven hoof of Nazism was evident from the start. Control of the company that produced the prototype was vested in the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, the Nazi organisation into which German workers had been dragooned after the abolition of free trade unions in 1933. In 1938 Hitler renamed the car KdF-Wagen, absorbing it into the 'Kraft durch Freude' (Strength through Joy) programme that sought to bribe German workers into supporting the regime with consumer goods, sea cruises and the like.

The Volkswagen was unmistakably spawned by the Nazi state, part of its campaign to woo the masses and later of its war effort, where it was known as the K-Wagen or Kübelwagen beloved of the Wehrmacht. One can argue that Volkswagen was a brand as heavily contaminated by its association with Nazism as Messerschmidt or Heinkel. A product from the same stable as Stuka dive-bombers and V-1 flying bombs could easily have had an image problem, for Doodlebug and 'Love Bug' were in reality kindred beetles.

In the 1950s though, the Volkswagen became the prime symbol of the affluence that spread across West Germany in the wake of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the economic wonder that apparently united German society by dispensing consumer prosperity across the classes. The Beetle exemplified West Germany's attempts to



efface the crimes of its recent past by reinventing itself as a democratic, egalitarian society where technological advances and economic efficiency worked to the advantage of the people as a whole. The parliamentary democracy of the Bonn regime was underpinned by the economic democracy of a system where the German people shared in the prosperity the German people had created.

This comes close to the concept of the people common in Western parliamentary democracies where in theory all citizens, regardless of class, wealth or rank, have equal rights and participate on an equal basis in the political process, a concept enshrined at the dawn of democracy in the constitutions of the newly independent USA and revolutionary France. But 'le peuple français' meant not only the newly enfranchised French masses seeking to assert their democratic rights against the hierarchy of king and nobility, as a self-governing, autonomous people. It also meant the French nation which, having established itself as sovereign in its own lands, sought to assert its sense of national ascendancy as 'la grande nation' and

unleashed 20 years of war on Europe.

When nationhood came to Germany in 1871 in the wake of Bismarck's victories over Austria and France, the democratic, popular element in the concept of the 'Volk' weakened further as Western, liberal notions of the 'the people' lost ground in face of the increasingly aggressive self-image of Germans as a powerful, expansionist national group. The bombastic words engraved on the new Reichstag building, 'Dem Deutschen Volke', expressed a new sense of national unity and identity forged not from a liberal consensus out of the democratic process, but on the battlefield out of conquest and a dangerous illusion of national superiority.

With the advent of racial ideology in the later nineteenth century, the identification of the Volk with the national unity escalated into the exclusive notion of the pure Germanic race 'cleansed' of any alleged impurity of blood or birth deriving from other, 'inferior' racial groups. From this emerged the Nazi concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* or 'people's community', a term stripped of any popular democratic connotations and denoting instead a racial collective organised on totalitarian lines and bound together by mythical ties of 'blood and soil' - groups that supposedly threatened its racial purity and health, Jews for example or the disabled, had to be eliminated.

Thus was the concept of the 'Volk' corrupted, as extreme nationalism culminated in the pseudo-popular system of the Nazi racial state. The Führer's 'people's car' was intended only for a select racial group, though that was obscured post-war by the huge success of the Volkswagen in export markets worldwide. Eventually it overtook the Model T Ford as the bestselling model of all time and drove its principal European competitor, the British motor industry, into terminal decline. One crumb of consolation for supporters of British manufacturing industry: the recently revamped version of the Beetle is plainly inferior to the revamped Mini, which is produced on the site of the Morris plant in Cowley, Oxford - by BMW.

Anthony Grenville

## Poor Bert Brecht Anthony Grenville

The title of Bertolt Brecht's autobiographical poem 'Vom armen B. B.', with its memorable opening lines 'Ich, Bertolt Brecht, bin aus den schwarzen Wäldern./ Meine Mutter trug mich in die Städte hinein/ Als ich in ihrem Leibe lag. Und die Kälte der Wälder/ Wird in mir bis zu meinem Absterben sein', came to mind when an article in *The Times* compared Brecht unfavourably with - of all people - Max Beerbohm. To compare one of the giants of modern theatre with the author of *Zuleika Dobson* is a masterpiece of blinkered insularity, even by the standards of the Murdoch press.

*The Times's* real quarrel with Brecht was, of course, political, not literary: Brecht was a convinced Marxist at a time when Marxist orthodoxy meant loyalty to Stalin. But those who accuse Brecht of unquestioning acceptance of Stalinist ideology and practice, like the renegade Communist Ruth Fischer, whose misreading of his play *Die Maßnahme* led her to call him 'the bard of the GPU' (later KGB), misunderstand his position.

It was, after all, Brecht who wrote a marvellously sly poem after the crushing of the East German workers' uprising of 1953, in which he asked the Communist government, which had blamed the people for forfeiting the regime's confidence, why it did not simply dissolve the people and elect another in its place. It was also Brecht who in the late 1930s wrote

the famous poem 'An die Nachgeborenen', in which he appealed to those born in a later, more peaceful age to pass compassionate judgment on his generation, forced to confront the evils of Fascism and capitalism in a world of apparently irredeemable cruelty and hatred - the anguished plea of the moralist unable to avoid soiling his hands with violence.

A deeper issue here is to what extent one's judgment of a work of literature should be determined by knowledge of the private life, beliefs and activities of the author. Is Arthur Koestler's analysis of Stalin's show trials in *Darkness at Noon* any the less artistically compelling because we know of the author's record of violence against women? Is the superbly crafted humanity of Theodor Fontane's novels less satisfying because we know of his aversion to Jews, from his letters to his friend Georg Friedlaender (a Jew, of course)? Do we rank Ezra Pound's *Cantos* lower because the poet ended up a ranting advocate of Italian Fascism?

It is easy to argue that no work that expresses support for an ideology as abhorrent as National Socialism can have literary merit - but then how do we judge acknowledged masters like the poet Gottfried Benn and the novelist Ernst Jünger, camp followers of that ideology for all that they avoided direct commitment to Nazism in its worst years?

## Sacred mission

While visiting my daughter who is studying in Jerusalem, I recently had the privilege to act as an emissary for the AJR and to deliver to Yad Vashem some 400 testimonies the AJR has received from members whose relatives perished in the Holocaust. I was met in the Hall of Names within the Yad Vashem museum complex by its director, Alexander Avraham.

The new museum, a prism-like structure, presents the history of the Holocaust with the individual stories highlighted in the unfolding historical narrative. Using more than 2,500 authentic artefacts including testimonies, photographs, film clips and works of art, the museum weaves over 90 personal accounts into a thematic and historical narrative, thus telling the story of the Holocaust through the voice of the individual.

The Hall of Names is a conical room designed to represent the towers of the gas chambers. Along the inside of the cone are hundreds of pictures of Jews of every background who perished. Mirroring the pictures is a deep hole with water at the bottom. I was told this was because water represents life and, if you look down into it, you see not only your own reflection but the reflection of the faces in the pictures. In this manner, your face and theirs are entwined.

Around the walls are black folders, each one containing the testimony of about 350 people murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. At present, Yad Vashem has a list of 3 million names. In an ongoing effort to collect more names before it is too late, Yad Vashem is urging people to assist in this sacred mission by ensuring that a testimony is completed for everyone who was murdered.

If there are members of your family whose names have not been recorded, please contact the AJR for a form so that their details can be added and preserved for eternity.

Carol Hart  
Volunteers' Co-ordinator, AJR

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SILVERMAN**

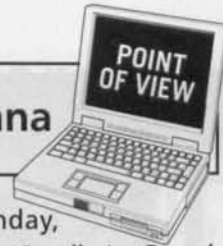
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## My love-hate relationship with Vienna



It was in the late forties that they put words to Johann Strauss's *Emperor Waltz*. There I was, in my teens, living in a market town called Banbury, when up swelled the words 'I was born in Vienna'. My wife is puzzled that the *Emperor Waltz* is so meaningful to me. 'How can you feel anything for a town, a country, a people, that threw you and your family out?', she asks. I haven't a clue, but I do.

My father was a doctor in Vienna. Then along came the Nazis, and they wanted to kill us. My father was due to go to Dachau. Only through the kindness of a patient who warned him that his name was on a list of Jews due for arrest did he not perish. A couple of months later we were on our way to Switzerland, and then to England. The Austrians had welcomed the Anschluss and embraced National Socialism with as much ardour as the Germans. My mother and I were in our apartment in Vienna on Kristallnacht when the Nazis destroyed it, as well as my father's surgery. My father? Together with his brother, he was caught attempting to climb into Switzerland and sent back to Vienna minus a few teeth.

So here we were in England (in Hampstead, where else?) with hardly any money, no knowledge of the language, and with my father's job prospects as a doctor almost negligible. We did have his Josef Schmidt records, brought from Vienna, to cheer us up. We also listened to all Viennese music on the 'wireless' - Strauss and Lehar (and yes, before you accuse the family of being lowbrow, Mozart too!). We followed the fortunes of Arsenal and West Ham football clubs because Hakoah of Vienna, a Jewish team, played against them in the thirties and my father was the club doctor.

Eventually, my father was allowed to work as a doctor, first in Becontree, then in Banbury. Richard Tauber was becoming popular. We listened to him

avidly every Sunday, along with Albert Sandler's *Grand Hotel*. Ninety minutes of Viennese music. Bliss!

My mother. The Frau Doktor! She was a great cook. And what did she mostly cook? Viennese dishes, of course! Tafelspitz, Wiener Schnitzel, Rostbraten, Apfel Strudel, and Kaiserschmarren.

My first holiday to Vienna was in 1948. The city was still divided into four sectors. Wien 2 - the old Jewish area - had been allocated to the Russians. It looked as if the war was still being fought there. Nothing had been rebuilt. With trepidation, we went on to the Friedhof, near the airport, to visit the graves of my sister and grandfather. Thankfully, though overgrown, they hadn't been desecrated.

Later, we walked round the Stadtpark, pausing to listen to the music played at the Kursalon. We went to Grinzing to see if the Heurigen still existed. My father sought out the Kaffeehäuser he had frequented before the war. And we visited Baden bei Wien and Semmering. What memories these two small towns must have evoked for my parents. Then it was back to Banbury!

Visiting Vienna became an annual pilgrimage for us. And in the eighties, after my parents died, I took my wife and four children there to show them where I had lived. The house had been destroyed. But the Prater was there in the background, with its famous Riesenrad, though there was no sign of Harry Lime! I intend taking some of my 11 grandchildren there this year.

Yes, I love Vienna - even though I was only three when I left. Sacher versus Demel: who cares? But how typically Viennese! How much greater a place Vienna would be if only the Jews hadn't been forced to flee!

**Peter Phillips (born Peter Pfeffer)**

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PHOTO: NIGEL SUTTON

Around 175 people attended the AJR's Holocaust Memorial Day service at Belsize Square Synagogue (see story on page 16)

## 'Making a difference': Holocaust Memorial Day, January 2006

'We called it genocide and no one came', said the former lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire as he sought to put into words his feelings of despair and terror as more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered by their Hutu neighbours in Rwanda in 1994. The United Nations officer, supplied with only a handful of peace-keeping soldiers, who were unable to prevent the genocide, spoke graphically of the dangers of intolerance and xenophobia at the national Holocaust Memorial Day event at the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff.

In honouring the individuals who risked their lives to save others, his message defined this year's Holocaust Memorial Day theme: one person can make a difference.

AJR member Nicole David spoke movingly about her experiences as a hidden child and the humanitarian acts of the family who cared for her in Belgium during the war. Her recollections complemented the remarks by residents of the French village of Le Chambon who acted to save Jewish lives, as well as those of Clare Keen-Thyrin, whose family also rescued Jews fleeing Nazism.

The AJR was also represented by opening speaker Eva Clarke, who was born in Mauthausen camp in Austria, and Ellen Singer, who spoke of her experiences as a Kindertransport survivor. Members of the AJR's Cardiff group attended the event along with Hermann Hirschberger, Bertha Leverton and AJR staff members.

Pierre Sauvage led the audience's appreciation of the daring actions of Charles Fawcett, who, together with Varian Fry, saved the lives of hundreds of Jewish people in Marseille. In a documentary highlighting his efforts that was screened as part of the Memorial Day ceremony, Mr Fawcett said simply: 'I thought we could make a difference. It's a responsibility people have.'

Addressing the meeting, Prime Minister Tony Blair said that 'Today's Europe of peace and prosperity is a lasting memorial to the victims.' He added that we think of the unthinkable 'to commemorate the millions who died in the Nazi onslaught' and 'to reflect on the victims of more recent genocides' before reminding people of the need to 'rededicate ourselves to fighting racism and embracing the tolerance of difference'.

The Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, added: 'The only antidote to fear is responsibility: the refusal to believe that there is nothing we can do, the decision never to take refuge in blaming others, making them scapegoats for our frustrations and fears.'

The occasion amply reflected the location of the Welsh capital with contributions from the Penylan Synagogue choir, the actor Philip Madoc, the soloist Katherine Jenkins, and poetry readings and dances performed by the National Dance Company of Wales.

Welsh First Minister Rhodri Morgan and

### Berlin memorial visit - reduced cost

We have now managed to reduce substantially the cost of our planned visit to the new Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The visit is planned to coincide with the 61st anniversary of the end of the Second World War and will take place between 7 and 10 May.

The revised cost, which includes tours of the Jewish Museum and the Wannsee Villa, will be £525. This includes flights, transfers, accommodation and breakfast, coach travel throughout Berlin, and an official tour guide.

As there will be a full programme, this visit will not be suitable for people with walking difficulties.

To reserve one of the limited places on the trip, please phone 020 8385 3070 or email [socialsec@ajr.org.uk](mailto:socialsec@ajr.org.uk).



PHOTO: YAKIR ZUR

Ginette Fournier-Rouquet, who received Yad Vashem's 'Righteous Among the Nations Award' in 2005, looking at her portrait at Marion Davies's photographic Holocaust Memorial Exhibition 'Absence and Loss'. Held in Cambridge and scheduled to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day, the exhibition illustrates the effect of the Nazi accession to power on German Jews, synthesising images of Holocaust memorials taken in Berlin with photographs of documents and artefacts created in the studio.

Cardiff Council leader Rodney Berman were proud to announce that every school child in Wales had taken 'The Pan-Wales Pledge' to make a difference, a specially commissioned poem written by Gwyneth Lewis, Wales's national poet.

Claire Keen-Thyrin's great-grandson, seven-year-old Samuel Pfister, had the honour of concluding the ceremony by lighting the memorial flame.

Michael Newman



# Letter to my German brother

You are nearly 10 years older than I. That doesn't make much difference now we are over 70 but it is a big difference whether you were only 10 in 1945 or already 20. When we last met in Germany we talked about the past. That is what I want to write to you about.

Forty years ago you and I went our different ways. I married a Jewish woman and eventually became a British citizen. You married a German girl. We both have children and grandchildren and can't complain. Your sister-in-law is the only Jew in your family and, as far as I know, among your acquaintances too. You know, of course, that my wife was also German until she and her parents were driven from their home. They were lucky England allowed them in.

At our departure you said 'Come back next year', but I couldn't say yes. We had spoken about the past and, when the conversation got round to Esther's Jewishness, you said that wasn't important: the only thing that mattered was her humanity. Do you really think that after all that has happened, a German can give the same simple answer the Enlightenment thought was possible? Do you think a German can tell a Jewish woman that she should be satisfied to call herself a 'Mensch'? Do you think she can put her Jewishness aside? For a Jew, after Auschwitz that would amount to self-negation and betrayal. When she told you she had rediscovered her Jewish identity and was proud of it, you were angry. Yes, the words 'Jew' and 'Jewish' have quite a different ring for you than for us. You associate with them something strange and unknown - perhaps also unpleasant, threatening, or un-German. Are the *Stürmer* pictures still in your mind, or the antisemitic prejudices and Christian stereotypes?

Have you ever considered what it means for her now to visit a German town, where SA-men like our grandfather and father would have marched through the streets shouting 'Deutschland erwache, Juda

## Jürgen Schwiening

verrecke!?' That was the new Germany our parents were so proud of. Do you remember them speaking about 'Konfirmationslager', where her grandmothers and aunt died? You say you didn't know any of this. Yes, but does it therefore not concern you? Today you know it: we have both had 60 long years to learn. When our parents' and our life improved because they found work in the armaments industry, when father joined the Brownshirts and then the Nazi Party, when he advanced in the police, Esther's family were systematically robbed of their rights, work and possessions, and forced to emigrate, and those who were unable to escape were eventually murdered. You never wanted to admit there was a connection. Had I said to you that we are the children of a generation of

**The words 'Jew' and 'Jewish' have quite a different ring for you than they do for us. You associate with them something strange and unknown - perhaps also unpleasant, threatening, or un-German.**

robbers and murderers you would have considered that an insult.

You told me many times: 'We don't want to hear any more. We've had enough. Television is full of it.' You've always had enough of it. You always knew it all. Our conversations never got beyond your objecting 'Don't start that again.' And then you'd add: 'We too suffered - we were bombed and lost everything.' When I told you what the prophet Hosea has to say about sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind you didn't reply. Once you said generously: 'We all make mistakes. War is terrible, that's why I'm a pacifist.' Yes, war *is* terrible but sometimes one *has* to fight, as with Hitler's Germany. I told you I might

have been a partisan had I been a young man in Poland or Russia. You were aghast: 'They were bandits, who shot our soldiers in the back!' Then you added that it must be the English influence on me.

One more thing I have to talk to you about, my brother. There is a nice wall-hanging in your living room. It's been there for years. 'It's from Russia', you said, 'Our father sent it.' You said that as if it was quite normal - that you bring something with you from the war, a present to your family. I remember when the carpet and some silver arrived. It must have come from the house of well-to-do people. Did you never ask yourself how father got hold of these valuables? They were totally out of place in our tiny flat. Carpets and silver were not part of our world, were they? When I asked you about father's war experience you quickly replied: 'He was only in the police, and only for a short time at the front. He was captured by the Russians and kept in a PoW camp until the end of '49.' That is true. When he came back he was a sick man. He never told me much about his time in the war. I suspect you know rather more because you too were in the East as a young soldier and perhaps father spoke to you as a comrade. Since then I've done the research which you so much resented, because I have a right to know - and so do you.

He was in the Protection Police and served in an SS police regiment involved in the so-called 'Bandenbekämpfung' in White Russia. In these campaigns hundreds of villages were burnt down after everything of value was taken. Many innocent people, mainly Jews, were 'sonderbehandelt' and the rest - men, women and children - were deported to the Reich as slave-workers. Do I need to tell you what 'sonderbehandelt' meant in Nazi jargon? For his part in one of these 'actions' father was awarded special points - alas, not enough for a medal. He proved himself and was soon promoted. Yes, our father still stands between us ...

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor reserves the right  
to shorten correspondence  
submitted for publication

### ARE THERE TOO MANY IMMIGRANTS?

Sir - I agree with Peter Prager (Point of View, February) when he cites the way in which earlier immigrants were absorbed and became an asset to this country; also that Britain needs more young immigrants to contribute to our economy and to help with the looming pensions crisis. But I cannot agree with him when he ridicules as prejudice, akin to the old prejudice against Jewish immigration, the apprehension of 'many Jews' (and surely not of Jews alone) that the influx of so many Muslims may intensify the dangers of violence in Britain. The comparison with Jews is completely misplaced. Such active hostility as existed was entirely by the host community against the immigrants: it was not reciprocated by the immigrants. Jewish immigrants kept their heads down; they aspired to integration; they were too economically sufficiently and upwardly mobile for there not to be a pool of young people who felt hopeless and, if they did feel deprived of economic opportunities, they would perhaps turn to socialism and its class solidarity, but not to a specifically Jewish resistance. Indeed, there was no ideology of religiously-inspired resistance, no preaching inside the country to exhort to it, and no feeling that such resistance would be encouraged by powerful forces outside the country.

Of course, the great majority of Muslim immigrants want to, and will, integrate in the same way as the Jews did, but it is not prejudice to be apprehensive about the trouble that can be caused by the minority who do not. Economic hardship is sometimes caused by discrimination on the part of the host community, but sometimes also by social factors within the immigrant community. Whatever the cause, the articulation of grievance and anger which it generates seems to be greater in the Muslim community than, for example, among Hindus.

I am not arguing that Britain should discriminate against Muslim immigrants - that would be a counter-productive overreaction. Not only are the great majority of Muslims valuable contributors to British society, but such discrimination would indeed justify the feelings of peaceful Muslims that Britain is Islamophobic - just as restrictions on Jewish immigration were justifiably resented by Jews as antisemitic. It is precisely our legitimate apprehensions which should stimulate us at least to make sure that there is no economic or social discrimination on our side. That cannot entirely solve the problem, but it would reduce it rather than exacerbate it.

*Ralph Blumenau*  
London W11

Sir - Mr Prager's article, while well-intentioned, does not fully state the facts. In order to declare an interest, I too arrived in England in late 1939 as a Jewish refugee. We came as genuine asylum-seekers in fear of our lives. Today's immigrants are frequently economic immigrants claiming to be asylum-seekers. Often brought in by gangs who make huge sums of money, mostly they come without skills.

Britain needs skilled and educated people willing to integrate. Let us welcome genuine asylum-seekers. The Jewish refugees who were allowed asylum in the late thirties were mainly highly skilled and educated, contributing out of all proportion to their number in the arts, science, medicine, business and many other fields. The same holds true of the Russians who went to Israel, and of many of those who re-emigrated to the USA and Australia. The 'Kinder' came from backgrounds which gave them the will to succeed despite the huge disruption.

*Bob Norton*  
Nottingham

Sir - I agree wholeheartedly with Peter Prager. The other day, an English friend of mine complained that the waiting lists in our hospitals were so long because 'too many people are coming into this country'. I reminded her that there might be no hospitals at all if these people hadn't come: the NHS would grind to a halt without them, as would public transport in London. It is bad enough to encounter such xenophobic attitudes among the English, but it really saddens me when Continental Britons express similar views. We, as erstwhile refugees, should never forget that Britain was once afraid to be 'swamped' by us.

*Edith Argy*  
London W9

Sir - There is a notice in my local library stating that the Borough of Barnet is prepared to help immigrants to obtain British citizenship by procuring the necessary forms for them, completing them, and sending them to Croydon (Home Office). When we were naturalised in the 1940s we had to do everything ourselves: no official help was offered. Moreover, we had to prove that we could read and write English as well as speak it.

*(Mrs) A. Saville*  
London NW4

### COALITIONS AND OTHER CONCOCTIONS

Sir - Congratulations on your leading article 'Coalitions and other concoctions' (February issue). The fate of the Weimar Republic is often held to be a dire warning to those of us who would like to see proportional representation in this country, and I think you have laid that particular ghost (and a few others). It is extraordinary that Britain can claim to be a model democracy when its electoral system elects governments on minority votes, and that a party such as the Liberal Democrats should have 66 MPs after receiving almost a quarter of the votes cast in the last general election.

*Professor Leslie Baruch Brent*  
London N19

### GERMAN AMBIENCE

Sir May I as one whose mother tongue is German but who is now more familiar with Shakespeare than Goethe put it to your contributors Halberstam (December 2005) and Graff (February 2006) that if they really miss the German ambience so



much, they may like to consider returning there.

*Robert Miller  
Leatherhead, Surrey*

#### 'GEORGE WHO?'

Sir Anthony Grenville's attempt to belittle the late George Best is not only in bad taste but also betrays ignorance of football basics. First and foremost, the British are a nation of football fans: hence the fuss about the demise of one of their one-time greats was only to be expected. Second, everybody who saw Best play - and, above all, his Manchester United colleagues such as Bobby Charlton - confirms that he was the outstanding British player of his time. He was faster than Stanley Matthews, had a greater variety of skills, and could score goals. *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum.*

*Fred Rosner  
Chigwell, Essex*

Sir - The *AJR Journal* should concentrate on more articles about the 1920s-50s (see Dorothy Graff's letter, February issue) and on German/Austrian-Jewish matters. Anthony Grenville's article 'George Who?' has no place in your journal.

*C. Lang  
London NW6*

#### BRUNDIBAR REVIVAL

Sir On the day I read about the *Brundibar* revival in your January 2006 issue, I received notice from the convent near Freiburg where she lived of the death of Schwester Veronica Grütters at the age of 83. As a sister of the Benedictine order, but with a musical education and some Jewish blood from one of her ancestors, she single-handedly resuscitated the score of *Brundibar* from sheets of music used in the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

You published my review of a recording of the music in January 1990. My wife Marianne and I met Veronica Grütters in her home a few years ago and found her to be a vivacious lady who refused an invitation to dinner in a restaurant because her order would not permit her to indulge in outside entertainment.

*Rudi Leavor  
Bradford*

#### COMMENDABLE COMMENTS

Sir I have read Rudi Braude's comments (January issue) in response to Inge Trott's letter and find these comments commendable. Could you please tell me what is prompting you to frequently publish her vitriolic and uninformed letters on the Israel-Palestinian Arab Islamic conflict?

*Raph Freeman  
Jerusalem*

#### THE BEST YEARS OF MY LIFE

Sir - I am writing to express my gratitude for making my life so comfortable at the age of nearly 82. I was born in Hamburg with two sisters and a brother, of whom only one sister survives. Our lives were comfortable until 1938, when all our luxuries, business and home were seized. My father was one of the few given the chance to escape Germany for Shanghai. My brother, sisters and I escaped by Kindertransport.

On arrival in England, I was sent to a hostel for girls in London. I met my husband while working at an ammunitions factory. Early marriage was hard and our accommodation was one large room. Working and looking after the family fell solely on my shoulders, which resulted in the breakdown of my marriage.

Being a single parent, I began night shifts at the Reading Battle Hospital, affording me the time to look after my family during the day. I met my new husband at the hospital but, due to his ill health, I became his nursemaid. He died in 1983. I began work as a carer at the Waylands Mental Hospital, Bradfield, until it closed. I continued working as a carer in the private sector until the age of 70.

By chance at the age of 76, I became involved with the AJR. This has resulted in my last six years being the best years of my life. Having had to struggle most of my life, I am not used to anyone, especially an organisation, that is prepared to offer assistance unconditionally. This has allowed me to stop worrying about little things and enjoy living. I consider my AJR social worker a true friend that I can turn to at any time. I would like everyone to appreciate what a wonderful organisation the AJR is.

*Inge Farr  
Reading*

### ARE YOU ON A LOW INCOME AND IN NEED OF HOMECARE HELP?

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# ART NOTES

Gloria Tessler



*Javanese Dancer Signed 'Dora Gordine', 1927. Bronze with wood base (Valsuani cast), 143.2 x 65.1 x 37cm. Courtesy of Dorich House Museum, Kingston University*

Jacob Epstein looked east for inspiration to the ancient world, and his attraction to the Chaldean, Egyptian and African traditions is reflected in the volume and energy of his sculptures. In **Embracing the Exotic: Jacob Epstein and Dora Gordine**, which runs at the Ben Uri until 19 March and then moves to Newcastle University's Hatton Gallery until 20 May, we see his work paired for the first time with that of another East European Jewish contemporary, Dora Gordine. Both founder members of the Society of Portrait Sculptors, they showed at the radical Leicester Galleries in London at the height of their careers. But Epstein outraged the London art world in the 1960s with his elemental, pregnant *Genesis*, which eschewed contemporary ideals of beauty in favour of the inner celebration of primitive life. Gordine was more romantic, but also more stylised; the female power of her nude sculptures has even more obvious oriental roots.

Epstein was deeply humanist rather than specifically religious, and frequently

read the Bible. His 54 pencil and water colour drawings for the Old Testament in the Redfern Gallery prove the depth of his immersion in Jewish lore and tradition, celebrating humanity at its root.

Opening the exhibition, Lord Smith of Finsbury, formerly Culture Minister Chris Smith, praised Jewish provenance for generating important standards of art. But while Epstein's gifts of solidity and sensitivity, once reviled, are now celebrated, Gordine's work proved more acceptable.

Is there a genuine link between these two artists, who shared a similar inspiration? Both rejected the academic influence of Greek and Roman art, turning instead to Africa, Mexico and Indian traditions. If by the term primitive we mean the peeling away of layers of received Greco-Roman ideas of beauty, then Epstein is indeed a pioneer and, like many others, took the brunt of the art world's rejection. In a written preface to the exhibition, Sir Anthony Caro says that both artists had a vision of the promised land. Gordine was less visionary and less experimental, but to her eye the beauty and grace of the oriental figure was entirely captivating. Her strongly defined Chinese, Malay or Javanese sculptures share something of Epstein's heavy earthiness, but for his luminous and challenging power read romanticism and Eastern dignity in her work. Their strength and more obvious charm spared her from the critics' savagery, and interestingly her own doll-like, impassive features betray a hint of the Javanese reflected in much of her work. They are also influenced by her early study of Hindu classic, dancerly forms.

Epstein's sculpture - pared down to the essence of being - is said to have influenced many twentieth-century European artists. Rodin, Brancusi and Modigliani were his early role models.

The artist and writer Roman Halter, whose moving paintings were featured by Tate Britain last year for the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the death camps, was the subject of the opening programme of the Spiro Ark spring cultural programme. Tribute to the Holocaust survivor's triumph over his circumstances was paid by Colin Wiggins, National Gallery Deputy Head of Education.

## REVIEWS

Chief engineer of the universe  
**ALBERT EINSTEIN - CHIEF ENGINEER OF THE UNIVERSE: ONE HUNDRED AUTHORS FOR EINSTEIN (THREE VOLUMES)**

edited by Jürgen Renn

Weinheim: Wiley-VCH, 2005, 472pp., €29.90

As a celebration of the centenary of Albert Einstein's 'annus mirabilis', the Fritz Thyssen Foundation for the Advancement of Science has produced this lavish and inexpensive collection of essays. It is in three sections: worldview and knowledge acquisition (largely scientific); Einstein - his life's path (largely biographical); and Einstein's world today (dealing with the development of topics to which Einstein contributed). It provides a disjointed but fascinating account of Einstein's life. He was a pioneer of quantum theory, although he refused lifelong to accept some of its implications. He was gloriously right about relativity.

Einstein was a pacifist, socialist and democrat, with an almost naïve belief in the possibility of resolving political problems through goodwill alone. He favoured universal disarmament and a world government, and expected it to emerge from the enlightenment and mobilisation of the masses through the 'intellectual leaders of all countries', among whom he counted himself. How such a government could be elected, how it could be made accountable, and how it would use its monopoly of force was less clear.

In real life, however, he backed away from naïve idealism. In 1918 he was distressed by the plight of East European Jewish refugees in the aftermath of the First World War and the rise of antisemitism in Germany. In spite of a theoretical opposition to nationalism, he became a committed Zionist and was instrumental in founding the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The part of Einstein's story with which I was least familiar was the campaign against him in the early 1920s, long before the Nazis came to power. A major prediction of Einstein's general relativity theory was confirmed by Arthur Eddington's expedition to Brazil to observe the total solar eclipse of 29 May 1919, which showed that light from a star was deflected by the sun's gravitational field. Criticism of Einstein should have



ended; instead, he was accused of self-promotion. The scientifically unqualified Paul Weyland founded an *Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Naturforscher zur Erhaltung reiner Wissenschaft e.V.* to oppose him. Einstein called it the *Anti-relativistische GmbH*. Weyland organised a mass meeting in the Berlin *Philharmonie* on 20 August 1920 followed by meetings throughout Germany.

Einstein was attacked because he was politically left-wing and because his relativity theory was too novel, but primarily because he was a Jew. Nobel laureates Johannes Stark and Philipp Lenard declared that all science was racially dependent and that relativity must be rejected on account of its non-Aryan and theoretical origins. There were campaigns to prevent Einstein lecturing and to avoid references to his work in the literature. (Nor were things better in the 'socialist' world. Soviet demagogues banned relativity as 'bourgeois idealism'.) While many of Einstein's colleagues defended him, a proposal to make him a freeman of the city of Ulm, his birthplace, was vetoed.

There is an extraordinary resonance between the campaign against Einstein and the recent attempts within the academic trades unions the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) to institute a boycott of Israeli universities and to persuade their members to sever all ties with Israeli academics. Neither NATFHE nor the AUT was urged to sever ties with academics in any other countries - even the nastiest tyrannies - just as Weyland's *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* did not concern itself with gentile scientists. A number of British academics, while protesting that Israel was inflicting collective punishments on Palestinian Arabs, wanted to muzzle Israeli academics, no matter what their political views were. The treatment of Bir-Zeit University was criticised but there was no recognition that it was founded by Israel after 1967. No doubt the Jordanians felt, percipiently, that the university would become a centre for political agitation. NATFHE held many of its discussions on Saturdays and Jewish holidays to prevent orthodox Jews from attending.

The German scientists who turned against Einstein did so on grounds that had nothing to do with the scientific validity of his theories. The same applies to the enemies of academic freedom in

the AUT and NATFHE. In Einstein's own words, quoted in this memorable book, 'The attitude of ... intellectuals, viewed as a class, [is] not better than that of the rabble.'

Bryan Reuben

### Yesteryear's neighbours

#### YESTERYEAR'S NEIGHBOURS: TRACES OF GERMAN JEWS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT OF BAD KISSINGEN FOCUSING ON THE PERIOD 1800-1945

by Cornelia Binder and Michael Mence

Obtainable from:

info@reflectionswood.org, 443pp,

€109 plus postage & packing

The writing of local Jewish history by non-Jewish, non-professional German historians is now widespread. Many of them spend all their spare time on their research and writing. When Michael Mence came to live in the district of Bad Kissingen in the early 1970s and later met Cornelia Binder, who was born in the district town of Bad Brückenau, they discovered a mutual interest in the history and fate of former Jewish citizens. Their enquiries drew little or no help and, initially, some hostility. It required considerable moral courage to seek information in the three district towns and smaller localities where Jews had lived, some for 300 years and more.

The two assembled an archive and created a travelling exhibition in the three district towns, from which resulted their first book, *Last Traces of German Jews in the Landkreis of Bad Kissingen*. Their work attracted the attention of former Jewish citizens in the *Landkreis* and nominations for the Wiener Library Award, which they received from the hands of this reviewer in 2002.

This extraordinary book is an extension of that work. Like *Last Traces*, it differs from all other local histories known to this reviewer in that it is written in both German and English. It differs in another respect too - by appealing to descendants of Jewish families originating from the district and to local people interested in history, as well as to scholars. One can imagine that the particularly well-referenced information will result in several more books.

The book is, in the first instance, a history of Jewish families from 1800 to 1945 in 21 locations in former administrative districts: Bad Brückenau - Stadt, Bad Brückenau - Bad, Geroda,

Platz, Riedenberg, Schondra, Unterleichtersbach, Zeitlofs; Bad Kissingen - Garitz, Maßbach, Poppenlauer, Steinach/Saale, Thundorf; Hammelburg - Bonmland, Dittlofsroda, Oberthulba, Untererthal, Völkersleier, Westheim.

Included are details of the structure, development and culture of all the Jewish communities in the *Landkreis*; information on original Jewish settlements; chronological tables; a list of names and occupations of the over 6,200 Jews who lived in the three districts; names of soldiers killed in the First World War; information on emigrants, synagogues and cemeteries; and a report by a Holocaust survivor.

The reference registers include an index of names, an index of places, photos and illustrations by place together with sources, explanatory notes, a bibliography, archives consulted with file references, and information provided by eye witnesses and others. The book is illustrated with 594 black-and-white and 66 colour plates.

Herbert Loeb!

## FILM

### A truly shocking affair

CACHÉ (HIDDEN)

directed by Michael Haneke

starring Daniel Auteuil and

Juliette Binoche

at selected cinemas

Every French film I see seems to have as its leading character either a TV celebrity or a high-flying publisher. This film has both: Georges, played by the dependable Daniel Auteuil, is a TV celebrity; his wife Anne - the delectable Juliette Binoche - is a prominent publisher. Georges and Anne's idyllic lifestyle comes to a bitter end when he begins receiving menacing videos about his personal life from an anonymous source. The videos bring back painful memories of his childhood, when, because of him, an Arab friend and his family were given rough treatment at the hands of his parents. As the couple's contented existence falls apart, it is evident that the theme of the film is no less than the collective racism of French society towards its Arab citizens.

Some three-quarters of the way through the film, a literally shocking event takes place - an event which connects graphically with the trauma in Georges's childhood. I will long

remember the *frisson* that swept through the packed cinema at this split-second image.

*Caché* has been showered with awards. It is directed by the 63-year-old Austrian Michael Haneke, who in previous films has tackled xenophobia and the victimisation of illegal immigrants; currently he is about to direct his next film, a three-hour epic about Nazi youth. According to a recent interviewer, Haneke makes for a truculent interviewee, with an ability to make you feel your questions are beneath him. Unwilling to provide pat explanations of his work, he evidently has contempt for his ice-cold media image. In *Caché* it shows.

This is a very taut film, acted with perfection, and always retaining our interest. There is much fascinating use of photographic imagery. The film's spooky air is enhanced by the total absence of background music. But with the repeated substitution of videos for film, we're not always sure what we are watching is 'real'. And this is the problem.

Now I realise there are two schools of thought on this. There is the school the director belongs to: viewers are to make their own minds up about what they are seeing. They are to be shocked into accepting that French society should be laden with guilt over wrongs done to the Arabs in their midst, that Georges is wracked with guilt and his past has come home to haunt him. We never actually learn who the sender of the videos is.

But I find myself attached to the second school of thought. Maybe I'm old-fashioned but I have a penchant for a firm conclusion. Maybe I'm lazy but I don't like to be packed off with guesswork. And this is precisely what happens here. Unable to reveal the shocking event described above, the critical point of the film, I confess to being totally at a loss as to why it took place: there's no rhyme or reason to it. But there are other holes too.

And the second biggest hole is precisely the ending of the film - when we are expected to sally forth into the night without even knowing who sent the wretched videos. (At one point, I even had it figured that Georges, in a fit of conscience, was sending them to himself.) And why, for instance, does Georges hesitate to tell his wife of his suspicions about who is sending the videos at the cost of their fast deteriorating relationship? And why is

their son angry with his mother for allegedly having an affair? Is she or isn't she? Again, it's your call. I could go on and on. And as for guilt feelings - I didn't see very much evidence of them - with Georges or anyone else.

Recently I saw *The Talented Mr Ripley*, based on the Patricia Highsmith novel. Not only did it end conclusively but there was a bonus: the villain, a triple murderer, got away with it. Now that's an ending worth staying up for.

Howard Spier

## Spring's New Promise

Freed from ice are stream and brook  
Sunshine gleams in every look  
Hope sprouts green from niche and nook.

Gone is winter's frosty reign  
Halcyon days are here again  
Life's re-newed in every vein.

Colours blaze in myriad hues  
Greens and yellows, reds and blues  
A tapestry of splendid views.

People throng through park and street  
Stepping lightly on their feet  
Breathing air that's mild and sweet.

Gone the days of gloom and chill  
Hearts uplifted with a will  
Hope the future's better still!

Lili Hart

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## Letter from Israel

Catching the last night of the proms on television on New Year's Eve, I found that the final chorus was neither *Land of Hope and Glory* nor Henry Wood's sea shanties but Parry's setting of Blake's *Jerusalem*. To hear it sung with gusto by the thousands-strong audience was very touching.

Throughout the ages, physical and spiritual Jerusalem has captured the imagination of millions, triggering emotions in the hearts of people of all races and creeds. To sit in a concert hall in Jerusalem and hear a choir trill the last notes of Fauré's *Requiem*, intoning the name of the city in a divine, celestial chorus, is an unforgettable experience. Equally poignant is hearing the opening aria of Handel's *Messiah*, where the words of Isaiah speak of comfort for Jerusalem and an end to its warfare. And there are many other examples.

The King James version of the Bible has been adopted by Anglicans as its original, true version. They find it hard to grasp that it is an erratic, often inaccurate translation, irrespective of its intrinsic value as literature. But whatever hold the city has had on Christians, as exemplified by the Crusaders, or on Muslims, who fought tenaciously to recapture it, it is we Jews who regard it as our physical and spiritual cradle.

The attempt by Israel's government a few years ago to change the city's official name to its Hebrew version, Yerushalayim, fell on deaf ears. Stamps were minted and documents printed, but no one seemed to take much notice. City names have been changed in the past, as evinced by Istanbul, Mumbai and Beijing, but not Jerusalem.

Its Arabic name is Al-Kuds, the Holy City, but no one seems to take much notice of that either. 'And was Al-Kuds builded here in England's green and pleasant land' just doesn't have the right ring to it.

Dorothea Shefer-Vanson



# PROFILE

Ronald Channing

## Bettine Le Beau Through a child's eyes



PHOTO: RONALD CHANNING

Bettine Le Beau remains a much loved star in the Jewish community's firmament, especially among Continental refugees and survivors as she herself was a hidden child. Celebrating her 74th birthday as a great-grandmother and defying the years, Bettine retains the exceptional beauty and lithe figure which made her a film and television actress performing regularly with Benny Hill, Morecombe and Wise, Mike and Bernie Winters, the Likely Lads, and as a 'Bond girl' in *Dr No*. Her vivacious personality, ready humour and wit, not to mention fluency in six languages, led to broadcasting, earning her a regular place on the BBC's tremendously popular *Petticoat Line* for nearly a decade. Her book *Help Yourself to Happiness* transmits her positive philosophy of life.

Bettine was born in Antwerp in 1932. Her father, Leopold Fallek, a native of Crakow, came to Antwerp after a spell on a kibbutz and worked in the docks. Her mother, Rachel, from Lodz, was on her way to America when the two met in a Jewish immigrants' boarding house and married in 1927. Every tenant in their Antwerp apartment block spoke Yiddish, though at school Bettine spoke Flemish. It was at Kindergarten that she discovered her love of art, dressing up and performing. Leopold was a furrier, but in the summer the family set up an ice cream stall on the beach at Ostend, where Bettine loved the freedom and remembers decorating holes in the sand with paper flowers and shells. When her father bought a shop in Brussels, Bettine learned French.

In 1940 this idyll came to an abrupt end. While her father was buying skins in London, German troops occupied Belgium. Despite chaotic scenes at Brussels station, where thousands were trying to escape, her mother hired a taxi for them to go to unoccupied Paris in the hope of travelling on to join her husband in London. Equivocation on the part of the British consulate in Paris prevented

them from obtaining visas before France was at war and the city occupied. They became refugees and had to register at the town hall.

A girl of eight in 1940, Bettine still recalls experiences as through a child's eyes. They were transported with other Jews to a village near Bordeaux, then taken to a castle with vicious dogs patrolling the perimeter. Eventually they were imprisoned in the Camp de Gurs in the foothills of the Pyrenees. She was one of 30 children in a barracks, sleeping on straw mattresses and surviving on starvation rations of bread and a thin gruel. However, she learned Spanish from Civil War prisoners in the camp.

Her mother bravely agreed to her children being smuggled out and they found themselves in a castle with Jewish children from Germany. Bettine knows that it was the French-Jewish relief organisation OSE which was behind their escape and subsequently housed and protected them. A plan to ship her from Marseilles to an uncle in America was frustrated by the USA's entry into the war, and a subsequent plan to

smuggle her into Switzerland was thwarted by the guide being caught with an earlier group of children. It was decided to find families who were prepared to accept the risks in hiding the children. A Protestant farmer and his wife with no children of their own, living in an isolated farm near Montelimar, took in Bettine and another girl of a similar age at Christmas 1942. All traces of their Jewish identity were erased and she became Betty Fretier, whose father was a prisoner and whose mother had died. The girls were able to attend the local school.

At the liberation - she can still hear the celebratory ringing of church bells - Bettine's brother found their mother, who had survived a number of camps, and his sister. Thanks to Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld, the family were eventually reunited in London. There Bettine learned English in two months, went to school and college, and, by the time she was 16, had blossomed into a beautiful young woman.

Answering an ad for a model with a fashion house, she met Peter; they married in 1952 and had a son and daughter. Responding to an ad for a television-show hostess with a photograph of herself from the *Daily Mirror*, she was, after a number of auditions, given a contract with the Ada Foster agency and kept busy playing beautiful French girls in commercials and films. In 1979 she founded The Feminine Touch charity.

In 1988, after spending three years in Israel, the family returned to England, where Bettine increasingly devoted her time and talent to Jewish charities as a volunteer entertainer talking about show business and how to retain one's youth and beauty. Today, she also talks to schoolchildren for the London Jewish Cultural Centre, is warmly welcomed by AJR groups throughout southern England, and is particularly proud of her weekly Yiddish classes at the Holocaust Survivor's Centre in Hendon and her membership of the Centre's Friends. Bettine is also a talented sculptor whose work is widely admired.

# INSIDE the AJR

## **Ilford: Tales laced with humour**

There was a good attendance for our first meeting of the year to hear Erich Reich speak about his experiences since he arrived in this country on the Kindertransport. He has certainly had a varied life, spending time in Israel, Manchester and London - even finding and losing a few wives in the interim. All his tales were laced with humour and everyone present enjoyed his reminiscences. *Meta Roseneil*

**Next meeting: Wed 1 March, 10.30 am.**  
Charles Elliman, Mayor of Redbridge

## **South London: Vienna coffee houses now and then**

We were fortunate to have Otto Deutsch, Chairman of the Essex AJR group, as our guest speaker. Though he attended at short notice, for some of us his comprehensive, informative and light-hearted talk about the coffee houses of Vienna brought back pleasant memories of our youth. *Inge Gredley*

**Next meeting: Thur 16 March. James Taylor - discussion on the merits of museums and memorials in remembering the Holocaust**

## **HGS: Happiness is 'an attitude of mind'**

Bettine Le Beau gave many convincing but surprisingly simple ways of increasing one's happiness. The emphasis was on feeling: feeling good about oneself, feeling young, and making others feel good. The answers she gave to many questions included a fascinating list of Yiddish curses but, as she pointed out, these were - usually - not meant seriously. *Paul Cohn*

**Next meeting: Mon 13 March. Eli Benson of Magen David Adom**

## **Brighton & Hove Sarid: the crypto-Jews of Portugal**

Our speaker Ivor Richard told us about the small community of crypto-Jews that has survived for 300 years in a remote mountain region of northern

Portugal. We were especially intrigued by the strange and wonderful subterfuges this barely 100-strong farming community employed to outwit the Inquisition and keep alive the flame of their Jewish faith and traditions. *Andrew Herskovits*

**Next meeting: Mon 20 March, 10.45 am.**  
Godfrey Gould, 'Some Jewish Contributions to Life and Landscape in Brighton & Hove'

## **Essex Message in a Bottle scheme**

A Southend Police Community Liaison Officer explained the Message in a Bottle scheme to us. If someone is found unconscious on the floor because of illness or an accident, this scheme will help to provide aid without further delay. To prevent burglaries, an assortment of devices is available free of charge to be fixed on doors and windows. Among a policeman's many weapons is a gas spray which will render an assailant helpless. *Julie Franks*

**Next meeting: Tues 14 March, 11.00 am.**  
John Diver, 'Why Wills should be Kept up to Date'

## **Pinner: a remarkable man**

About 50 of us listened to Hugh Lewis of Bushey Museum give an excellent talk, with splendid illustrations, on Sir Hubert von Herkomer, a self-taught painter famous in Victorian times but almost forgotten now - except in Bushey, where he lived and worked. *Paul Samet*

**Next meeting: Thur 2 March, 2.00 pm. 'Any Questions?', chaired by Gerald Hellman with a distinguished panel**

## **Lavish entertainment in Herts**

The group met at the home of Monica Rosenbaum, where we were lavishly entertained. We welcomed Prof and Mrs Newcome from Stevenage and had a lively and interesting chat among ourselves. *Sam Ostro*

**Next meeting: Thur 23 March. AJR President Ludwig**

## **Scotland theatre outing**

Following last August's successful theatre outing to the Edinburgh Festival to hear Rabbi Julia Neuberger speak on

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'Society and Morality', AJR member Francoise Robertson organised another successful theatre outing in December, when once again members of the Glasgow and Edinburgh groups had a most enjoyable visit to the Edinburgh Festival Theatre to see *Annie Get Your Gun*. *Susanne Green*

## **A good laugh in North London**

We had the pleasure of being entertained by Rabbi Plancey of Boreham Wood Synagogue. Imagine a rabbi who not only has a repertoire of funny stories and jokes but actually knows how to tell them! It's not as though we were rolling in the aisles but all 30 of us present had a good laugh. *Herbert Haberberg*

**Next meeting: Thur 30 March. Helen Fry, 'The Pioneer Corps: Refugees in Uniform'**

**Outing: Thur 9 March. Wiener Library. Contact Susan Lewis at Head Office**

## **Manchester Continental Friends**

In Manchester, in addition to the main meetings with speakers organised so well by Werner Lachs, the AJR now has four new small social groups: 'Continental Friends', who meet every two or three months mainly in members' homes.

These groups provide an opportunity for members living away from the central areas, to meet others to share thoughts and experiences.

For instance, at a meeting in Broughton Park/Crumpsall, two members discovered they had come on the same ship (*The Washington*) on the Kindertransport. Gerda Rothberg remembered the date on which they left Germany, Alice Rubinstein the date on which they arrived - you can imagine the dialogue which followed!

At a Prestwich/Whitefield meeting in January, Werner Lachs told us about a book recently published in Germany. Peter Lorenz Johansen, a consultant



pediatrician who had disagreed with his father, a Nazi sympathiser, had discovered documentation on Werner's uncle, also a consultant pediatrician, traced Werner's family tree and written the story of his uncle.

At recent meetings in Didsbury, new members felt they had come full circle - meeting with fellow Continentals to share experiences for the first time, some not having previously realised that there were others living in the area.

At meetings in Cheshire, members have found they can share views on

issues including the new memorial in Berlin and their experiences of the communities in the UK to which they came - some good, some not so good.

By using the AJR transport budget, we have been able to pay for taxis to help many members to attend these meetings.

For information on our new Manchester Continental Friends groups, please contact Susanne Green on 0151 291 5734.

Susanne Green  
AJR Northern Groups Co-ordinator

**FORTHCOMING MEETINGS** *East Midlands* Social get-together 7 or 8 March tbc  
*Surrey* Sun 19 March Social get-together



At Leeds Continental Friends fundraising coffee morning for Holocaust Memorial Project: Pippa Landey (AJR volunteer), Annie Perrez (AJR volunteer), Ronny and Lesley Millet, Henriette and Rodney Lee, Barbara Cammerman, and child presenters Shana and Toby Winston

#### AJR GROUP CONTACTS

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**KT-AJR (Kindertransport)**  
Andrea Goodmaker 020 8385 3070

**Paul Balint AJR Day Centre**  
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#### AJR LUNCHEON CLUB

Wednesday 15 March 2006  
11.45 am for 12.15 pm

Rabbi Roderick Young  
'The Secret Jews: One Rabbi's  
Strange Journey of Discovery'

**KT-AJR** Kindertransport  
special interest group  
MONTHLY MEETINGS AT  
CLEVE ROAD

Monday 6 March 2006

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(in Iran)'

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9.30 am - 3.30 pm

**MARCH Afternoon Entertainment**

Wed 1 Madeleine Whitson

Thur 2 Margaret Opdahl

Mon 6 KT Lunch - Kards &  
Games Klub

Tue 7 CLOSED

Wed 8 Mike Marandi

Thur 9 Geoffrey Strum

Mon 13 Kards & Games Klub

Tue 14 CLOSED

Wed 15 LUNCHEON CLUB

Thur 16 Wizo Ladies choir

Mon 20 Kards & Games Klub

Tue 21 CLOSED

Wed 22 Sheila Games

Thur 23 Jen Gould

Mon 27 Kards & Games Klub

Tue 28 CLOSED

Wed 29 Simon Gilbert

Thur 30 Joe Kay

#### DIARY DATES

25 April Yom Hashoah

11-18 June Eastbourne holiday

27 June AGM

9-16 July Lytham St Annes  
holiday

29 Oct-5 Nov Bournemouth holiday

For further information about any of these  
events, please call us on 020 8385 3070.

#### 'DROP IN' ADVICE SERVICE

Members requiring benefit advice please  
telephone Linda Kasimir on 020 8385 3070  
to make an appointment at AJR,  
Jubilee House, Merrion Avenue,  
Stanmore, Middx HA7 4RL

Editorials and articles published, and opinions expressed, in the *AJR Journal* are not necessarily those of the Association of Jewish Refugees and should not be regarded as such.

**FAMILY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Birthday**

**Holden, Herbert** (né Holzinger). Happy 80th birthday, Pops! Much love from Edith, David, Deb, Del, Julia, Gary, Toby and Joanna.

**Classified**

Grandmother seeks to purchase an upright piano as a present for her grandsons. Please telephone Mrs Sands on 020 7794 4827.

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**ANOTHER HOLIDAY IN EASTBOURNE**

After last year's wonderful holiday in Eastbourne we are returning to the  
**Best Western Landsdowne Hotel**

**Sunday 11 June to Sunday 18 June**

**Price £400 + £20 single room supplement**

If you wish to book a superior room, there will be a further supplement.

Price includes Dinner, Bed & Breakfast, transport from, and returning to, the Day Centre in Cleve Rd, lunch on journey to Eastbourne, entertainment in the hotel

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**HOLIDAY FOR NORTHERN MEMBERS**

**Sunday 9 July - Sunday 16 July 2006**

**AT THE FERNLEA HOTEL  
St Annes**

The cost, including Dinner, Bed and Breakfast, is £410 per person

The hotel charges a supplement per room for sea view or deluxe room

Programme includes  
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OUTINGS

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DISAPPOINTMENT**

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**NORTHERN SECOND GENERATION  
GATHERING**

Sunday 2 April in Leeds

All from the Second Generation are welcome.

For details, please contact  
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barbara@ajr.org.uk

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## Obituaries



### Benedikt Isserlin

Benedikt Isserlin, who has died at the age of 89, was the head of the Department of Semitic Studies at Leeds University for over 20 years. He was born in Munich, his family descending from the rabbi and scholar Moses Isserles (1525-72). His father was professor of psychiatry in Munich. The rise of Nazism prompted his parents to send him to Switzerland, where he attended the universities of Berne, Zürich and Basle, where he read history and archaeology. He subsequently joined his sister Beata in the UK - she financed his study at the University of Edinburgh. He moved to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he studied oriental languages.

During all his years of study and after he rarely missed an opportunity to take part in excavations on sites in North Africa and the Far East. His crowning achievement was his series of excavations in the Phoenician site in Motya.

In 1951 he joined the University of Leeds as an assistant lecturer and became a Reader in 1978. He taught a variety of subjects including Near Eastern archaeology, Hebrew and Arabic languages and literatures.

A longstanding member of the AJR, Benedikt Isserlin had begun in recent years to attend AJR Continental Friends meetings in Leeds.

### Irma Wedel

My friend Irma Wedel, who has died in hospital, was a long-time member of the AJR and regularly attended meetings until her health began to fail and she went to live at Kay Court on Finchley Road, where she was well cared for.

Despite her dreadful experiences - losing one of her brothers and both parents in the Holocaust and fleeing to England on a Kindertransport together with her beloved brother Rudi, who pre-deceased her - Irma was always lively and tried to make the best of things.

She was born Irma Netzer in Munich on

25 June 1918. I believe her father had a cigarette factory and that she worked there before fleeing to England. Her family life was close and loving, and she had many friends, with some of whom she renewed contact after the war. She loved to sing, dance and skate. She married 'Eddie' Wedel, who pre-deceased her many years ago. They had one son, Roy, who has just celebrated his 60th birthday.

Irma liked to travel abroad on holiday, and went more than once to visit her brother Rudi and his family in America.

Jean Robertson

## Arts & Events Diary March

**Sat 25 Feb to Sun 5 March Jewish Book Week.** All events at Royal National Hotel, Bedford Way, London WC1. To purchase tickets tel 0870 060 1798 or visit [www.jewishbookweek.com](http://www.jewishbookweek.com)

**To 14 May 'Passover - Journey to Freedom'** Jewish Museum, Camden Town

**Mon 6** Geoffrey Ben-Nathan MA, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield: A Point of View' Club 43

**Thur 9** Czech Jewish History Seminar London Jewish Cultural Centre (LJCC), 2-4 pm

**Thur 9** Bozena Steinerova in concert. UK debut of prize-winning Czech pianist. LJCC, 7.30 pm

**Mon 13** No lecture (hall not available). Club 43

**Wed 15** Prof Jean-François Bergier, 'Switzerland and the Second World War: Experiences of an Historian', at Wiener Library, 7 pm. Wiener Library/Leo Baeck Institute/Centre for German-Jewish Studies, University of Sussex lecture series

**Mon 20** Dr Charmian Brinson, 'The Anglican Bishop, the Methodist Minister and the Women of Rushen: George Bell, J. Benson Harrison and their Work for Women Internees in WW2' Club 43

**Mon 27** Roy Clements, 'Joyce, Yeats and Beckett, and Irish Sport' Club 43

### ORGANISATION CONTACTS

**Club 43 Meetings at Belsize Square Synagogue, 7.45 pm. Tel Hans Seelig on 01442 254360**

**Jewish Museum, Camden Town, tel 020 7284 1997**

**London Jewish Cultural Centre, tel 020 8457 5000**

## Central Office for Holocaust Claims

Michael Newman & Samara Wolinsky

### Restitution of stolen Jewish property

The City of Vienna is searching for the former owners of art and cultural items stolen during the Nazi era so that the objects, owned by the City, can be returned to the rightful parties.

On 29 April 1999 the Vienna City Council decided that art and cultural items held in the city's museums, libraries, archives and collections appropriated during the Nazi era were to be considered questionable acquisitions. There are clear indications that these objects were obtained from Jewish owners through acts of robbery, confiscation and expropriation and were later auctioned or sold as a result of Nazi persecution.

It is thus important that such objects still in the possession of the City of Vienna be restored to their initial owners or their legal successors. The restitution of these items is the remaining step of Austria's indemnification efforts.

Since 27 September 2001 the museums of the City of Vienna have published on their website 148 objects acquired from the Vugesta (Gestapo Office for the Disposal of the Property of Jewish Emigrants) with photos and a detailed description of the articles. Additionally, there is a list of 1,545 objects on the website of the Museum der Stadt Wien ([www.wienmuseum.at](http://www.wienmuseum.at)) that were appropriated during the Nazi era.

Relevant information on the origins of the items should be addressed to Dr Peter Eppel, Wien Museum, Karlsplatz, A-1040, Wien, Karlsplatz, Austria. The telephone number is +43 1 505 87 47 84034.

Written enquiries should be sent to Central Office for Holocaust Claims (UK), Jubilee House, Merrion Avenue, Stanmore, Middx HA7 4RL, by fax to 020 8385 3075, or by email to [mnewman@ajr.org.uk](mailto:mnewman@ajr.org.uk).

## Holocaust memorial week

This sixth Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), the first organised under the chairmanship of Dr Stephen Smith, held a national commemoration in Cardiff at which Prime Minister Tony Blair addressed a packed audience. At the University of Sussex, the campus programme devised by its German-Jewish Studies Department again benefited from the AJR's support. I joined several other capably organised events held in London during the week - each, though, attended predominantly by refugees, survivors and local officials, with few from the wider public.

In the Greater London Authority's ultra-modern City Hall, Baroness Sally Hamwee oversaw the capital's ceremony. Speaking eloquently on behalf of the Kindertransportees, Hermann Hirschberger recalled the vicious antisemitism of his classmates and teachers and violent attacks by the Hitler Youth. Failing to obtain a refuge abroad for the whole family after the Kristallnacht pogrom, his parents found places for Hermann and his brother on the Kindertransport, which he described as an act of 'decency, humanity and compassion unique to England'.

Dr James Smith of the Aegis Trust suggested that 'Never again' appeared a hollow cliché when considering later genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and now Dafur in Western Sudan, where 2 million people remained under constant threat. Ideology that led to genocide had to be combated. Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, read a moving passage from the memoirs of Miep Gies, the woman who hid Anne Frank and her family in Amsterdam. Rabbi Barry Marcus warned that antisemitism was 'happening again before our eyes', and that echoes of the Iranian President's perverse denials of the Holocaust were to be found in Britain. 'The memory of the Shoah is a private grief with significance for all', he said, 'and ultimately an assault on all humanity'. Rabbi Marcus intoned the Kaddish and musical contributions were made by Israeli cellist

Sagi Hartov and the JFS Senior Choir.

At Barnet Council's HMD event, held in a 600-people marquee in Hendon Park, 94-year-old Sir Nicholas Winton recounted his motivation for rescuing 692 Czech Jewish children. In an address Bertha Leverton thanked Britain for their rescue, noting that 'One country made a difference, and that was England'. Actress Bettine Le Beau and Gina Schwartzman spoke of their good fortune in surviving as hidden children. Rev Bernd Koschland, Councillors Katia David and Rabbi Aba Dunner devised the programme. At Brent Cross Shopping Centre, the Mayor of Barnet opened the Jewish Museum's Kindertransport exhibition 'The Last Goodbye', describing the rescue of 9,500 children from Nazi Europe. Among those present were the indefatigable Rev Leslie Hardman, who entered Bergen-Belsen camp as a military chaplain. Hermann Hirschberger, speaking for the Kinder, referred to the sacrifice made by parents in sending their children on this unique act of rescue.

The AJR's well-attended Holocaust Memorial Day Service (see photo on page 4) was held at Belsize Square Synagogue and led by Hermann Hirschberger. Ludwig Spiro, founder member and President of the AJR and now in his 94th year, recalled that the association was established when it was 'essential to have an organisation able to look after refugees' interests, help them integrate into the country and support the war effort'. He welcomed Dr Andrew Balint who, 20 years previously, had brought him the support of the Paul Balint Trust, which made the establishment of a day centre possible. Anthony Spiro, Ludwig's younger son and an AJR Trustee, described how responsibility had devolved to a younger generation. The 35 regional groups were maintaining the level of membership, an in-house programme was creating an invaluable archive of 'Refugee Voices', and complementary support was being given for educational projects in universities, schools and Holocaust institutions.

## Newsround

### Holocaust centre for Vienna University

The University of Vienna is to build a Holocaust centre in honour of Simon Wiesenthal. The centre will include thousands of documents, including files from the country's wartime resistance and the country's Jewish community. It is expected to cost over \$17m and to be completed by 2010.

### Actress launches Anne Frank website

Actress Emma Thompson has helped launch a website connected to the Anne Frank museum by placing her name on a leaf at the Amsterdam museum, according to a report in the *JTA* (New York). Visitors to the website - [www.annefranktree.com](http://www.annefranktree.com) - can attach a story or a poem about what Anne Frank means to them to a cyber 'chestnut tree', a replica of the tree that sat outside her attic.

### Austrian authorities accused of complacency

Efraim Zuroff, the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Jerusalem branch, has said that 'Austria is a paradise for Nazi war criminals'. His remarks followed a meeting with the Austrian interior and justice ministers as part of the Wiesenthal Centre's Operation Last Chance. Mr Zuroff said that the 77 suspects currently being investigated by the Austrian authorities were being dealt with 'slowly and passively'.

### Poll finds less hostility towards Jews in Russia

According to a new nationwide poll, the majority of Russians do not harbour negative feelings towards Jews and the percentage of Russians who disapprove of antisemitism has increased since last year. A year ago, a poll conducted by the same firm, the Public Opinion Foundation, found that 47 per cent of Russians said they were neutral towards those who dislike Jews, compared to 38 per cent this year. Last year, 34 per cent said they had negative feelings about those who do not like Jews, compared to 42 per cent this year.

### German-Israeli relations

The German post office has issued a stamp marking 40 years of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel.