



# AJR JOURNAL

The Association of Jewish Refugees

## Honouring our Czech Mates

On 1 October 1938, eighty years ago this week, Nazi Germany began its occupation of the Czech Sudetenland. It was the beginning of what the historian Richard J. Evans called, "The Rape of Czechoslovakia". It marked the start of a terrible half-century for Czechs and Slovaks and, above all, for Jews.



From L-R: Dominic Raab, Herbert Lom, Vera Schaufeld, Robert Maxwell and Franz Kafka – all part of Czechoslovakia's rich Jewish heritage.

Louise London, in her book, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948* (2000) shows how refugees from Sudetenland fell into three main groups: Sudeten Germans, 'old Reich' refugees who had already escaped to Sudetenland from Germany and Austria and some 20,000 Jews. Most went to Czechoslovakia but after the German invasion in March 1939 had to seek refuge elsewhere.

They met with a less generous response from British officials than Jews seeking to escape Germany or Austria. Not only did they have to deal with British antisemitism but also a curious snobbery at the Foreign Office about people from

the new, small countries which had emerged after Versailles and especially in Chamberlain's infamous phrase, "a far-away country". Czechoslovakia just seemed too remote.

There was little awareness of modern Czechoslovakia, a new world of cinemas (the first cinema in Prague opened in 1907), department stores, electric tramcars, clerks and salesmen like Gregor Samsa, the central character in *Metamorphosis*. And even less awareness of the exciting new culture emerging from the new Czechoslovakia. Kafka was virtually unknown in Britain  
*Continued on page 2*

### COME FOR LUNCH

With the new year chaggim behind us we are now looking forward to a packed Autumn, an undoubted highlight of which will be our Annual Lunch on Sunday 21 October.

There are still some tickets available for the lunch, which is taking place at the Holiday Inn in Elstree. Please contact Susan@ajr.org.uk or call the AJR office if you would like to book.

Read on for details of other AJR events and activities taking place this Autumn.

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## Honouring our Czech Mates (cont.)

before the war. He was not translated into English in his lifetime and by the war only three novels and one short story had been translated.

Kafka, of course, was just part of an explosion of cultural creativity in Czechoslovakia that included writers like Karel Čapek, Franz Werfel and Jaroslav Hašek (*The Good Soldier Svejk*) and composers like Dvorak, Janáček and Smetana. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Prague had become one of the great centres of modern Europe. We often think of *fin de siècle* Vienna as the crucible of modernism but we forget that Budapest and Prague were also important centres.

Kafka died before the occupation of Czechoslovakia. His sisters were less fortunate. They were killed in the death camps, among the 263,000 Jews from the Czechoslovak Republic who were killed in the Holocaust.

Some of Kafka's closest friends were luckier. Max Brod and his wife escaped to Palestine in 1939, taking Kafka's manuscripts with him. Another literary friend of Kafka's, Felix Weltsch, left Prague with Brod on the last train out of Czechoslovakia and also settled in Jerusalem.

Palestine was one destination. Singapore another. Two years before Brod left, the Sträussler family sailed to Singapore. Dr. Eugen Sträussler worked for the Bata Shoe Company. He died during the Japanese invasion of Singapore but his wife and his two sons, Petr and Tomas, escaped to India where she married a British major, Kenneth Stoppard. They settled in Britain soon after and he anglicised his stepsons' first names and changed their surname to his. Only in 1993 did Tom Stoppard learn of his Jewish origins and that his four grandparents and three aunts died in death camps. One of his great themes as a playwright, especially in his breakthrough play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, was how lives can end up differently, how contingency is so important.

Many other Czech and Slovak Jews emigrated to the United States and

South America, but most escaped to Britain and France. Among the extraordinary Jewish refugees who came to Britain on the eve of the Second World War were the Labour politician, Lord Alf Dubs, who came with the *Kindertransport*; the actor Herbert Lom (born Herbert Charles Kuchačević ze Schluderpacheru), famous for playing Louis in *The Ladykillers*, Napoleon in *War and Peace* and, above all, the twitching Chief Inspector Dreyfus in *The Pink Panther* films in the 1970s; the film and theatre director, Karel Reisz, one of the key figures in the British New Wave of the 1950s and '60s and famous for films like *Saturday Night And Sunday Morning* (1960) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981); the great literary critics, Erich Heller, author of the classic study, *The Disinherited Mind* (1952) and JP Stern, professor of German at UCL for many years; the philosophers Ernest Gellner and Stephan Körner; Dorrit Dekk, the graphic designer who also worked during the war at Bletchley Park; the conductor and pianist, Walter Süsskind; the historian, GR Elton (born Gottfried Ehrenberg), who revolutionised our understanding of the Tudors, and taught at Cambridge for almost forty years, and his brother, Professor Lewis Elton (born Ludwig Ehrenberg); Robert Maxwell (born Ján Hoch), the publishing magnate, MP and press baron.

Several things are striking about these distinguished refugees. First, the range of achievements, from philosophy to cinema. Second, how young they were. Most came as children, teenagers or in their 20s. From this list the oldest was Erich Heller, born in 1911. Thirdly, the vast majority came from big cities, mostly from Prague or Ostrava. Finally, the personal terrible losses that so many endured in their youth, losing parents and other relatives in the Holocaust.

In addition, there was the second generation: the comedian and writer, Ben Elton, son of Lewis; the Brexit minister Dominic Raab, whose father came to Britain as a Czech Jewish refugee aged just six; the judge Sir Bernard Rix, whose family had owned the largest department store in Ostrava; and the literary journalist, Matthew Reisz, and his brother, the

film producer, Barney Reisz, sons of the filmmaker.

But some of the most moving stories are told by less well-known refugees. Last month I was fortunate to speak to Leo Wiener. Born in Ostrava, near the Polish border, he was only six when his parents escaped to Cracow and then sailed from Gdynia (on the Polish coast) to Tilbury, arriving in May 1939. Seventy relatives were killed in the Holocaust, including three grandparents, an aunt and uncle. His family ended up in Taunton where his father, who had four university degrees, including law and political economy, worked as a school cleaner. Leo's father thought of anglicising his name to "Wilson", but his son laughed and said that with his accent and central European looks he would never pass for a "Wilson". After a series of jobs in Taunton his parents ended up catering at a Jewish golf club in Potters Bar. Leo who arrived here without a word of English, trained as a pharmacist and settled in north London. On Sundays he and his wife had lunch at the Czech Club in West Hampstead where Herbert Lom was a regular.

Vera Schaufeld also has a deeply moving story which she tells with extraordinary dignity. Born in Prague in 1930 she was one of 669 Czech children, most of them Jews, who were rescued by Nicholas Winton on the *Kindertransport* and came to England, where she grew up in a Christian family in Suffolk. Her grandmother died at Terezin and her parents were killed at Travniki. She met her husband, a Polish survivor from Auschwitz, in Israel but they returned to live in London. She attends every *Kindertransport* reunion. I asked her whether she considers herself Czech, Jewish or British? "100% Jewish," she replied. "British-Jewish, Jewish-British. It is very difficult to say."

Despite such losses, Czech Jews have made an extraordinary contribution to Britain. As we remember the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Anschluss* and *Kristallnacht* we should also remember what Czech Jews went through and what they gave to this country.

**David Herman**

## KRISTALLNACHT SERVICE AT THE ABBEY

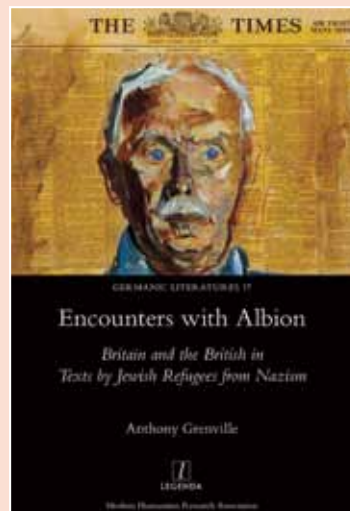
In conjunction with the West London, Belsize Square and New North London Synagogues, please join us for a special service to mark the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht at 6.30pm on Thursday 8th November at Westminster Abbey.

Free entrance strictly by tickets available via the Westminster Abbey website: [www.westminster-abbey.org](http://www.westminster-abbey.org) or by contacting [enquiries@ajr.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ajr.org.uk)



The interior of Westminster Abbey

## ENCOUNTERS WITH ALBION



A new book by Dr Anthony Grenville, the former consultant editor of the AJR Journal, will look at the relationship between Britain's Jewish refugees and their new homeland, from the refugees' perspective.

*Encounters with Albion* was commissioned by the AJR to help fill what is seen as an important literary gap. While much has been written about British attitudes to the Jewish refugees from Hitler who fled to this country after 1933, little attention has been paid to the ways in which those refugees perceived and depicted their (often somewhat reluctant) hosts.

From their impressions on arrival, through the tumultuous events of World War II and mass internment, and on into the long period of integration after 1945, Anthony Grenville expertly traces the development of refugee responses to their new homeland. Drawing on a wide range of novels, autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and letters by Jewish refugees, he recreates the course of a complex and sometimes fraught relationship, but one that ultimately arrived at a largely settled resolution.

The book will be launched on 31 October at the Wiener Library ([www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Whats-On?item=408](http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Whats-On?item=408)) and is also available to preorder (ISBN 978-1909662941). It will, of course, be reviewed in the AJR Journal after publication.

## WHY NOT TRY AJR'S MEALS ON WHEELS SERVICE?

The AJR offers a kosher Meals on Wheels service delivered to your door once a week.

The meals are freshly cooked every week by Kosher to Go. They are then frozen prior to delivery.

The cost is £7.00 for a three-course meal (soup, main course, dessert) plus a £1 delivery fee.

Our aim is to bring good food to your door without the worry of shopping or cooking.

For further details, please call AJR Head Office on 020 8385 3070.

## DEBATE OF THE MONTH



Hundreds gathered in Manchester last month in the latest rally against antisemitism. Is the campaign working in your area?

## Mazel tov Edith

Earlier this year AJR member Edith Poulsen celebrated her 100th birthday. Her AJR social worker Dean Lloyd-Graham was delighted to be at her party, which took place in Walthamstow.



Dean Lloyd-Graham with Edith Poulsen

Edith, who escaped from Austria with her daughter Sylvia, married London cabbie and historian Charles Poulsen in 1949. They had over 50 happy years together before he passed away in 2001.

Edith is the oldest member of Waltham Forest Labour and has played a huge role in working to build community cohesion. At her party the chairman of British Muslim Friends of Labour, Shokat Ali, surprised her with flowers and a special card to accompany her traditional greeting from HM The Queen.

# Northern England on display



Huddersfield – HSFA Director Emma King and Chair Lilian Black with some of the artefacts



Holocaust survivors welcomed to Huddersfield's new Centre, (l-r) Heinz Skyte, Trudie Silman and Arek Hersh

**The new permanent public exhibition at the University of Huddersfield strikes a powerful warning note about the perils of antisemitism and all forms of racial prejudice. Part funded by the AJR it is based around the stories of survivors who made new lives in the North of England.**

Opened to the public last month, the new Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre was developed in partnership with the University by the Leeds-based Holocaust Survivors' Friendship Association (HSFA).

Set to become an important destination for schools, students and adult visitors from throughout the North, the centre features copious photographs and text panels telling the story of the rise of Hitler, the roots of Nazi anti-Semitism and the mounting persecutions of the 1930s, leading to the policy of exterminating Europe's Jews.

The vast network of forced labour and death camps is illustrated and themes explored include the Kindertransport, the mechanics of the Holocaust, and how the civilian populations of the Third Reich responded to the atrocity. There are also several examples of resistance and humanity.

Touch-screens enable visitors to see and hear the testimonies of the survivors who have contributed to the Centre's memory bank, most of whom are AJR members.

HSFA Chair Lilian Black, whose father Eugene Black was sent to Auschwitz Birkenau in 1944, has been a driving force behind the creation of the Centre. "We are not creating this Centre for the past, but for the future," says Lilian, stressing the acute relevance of the exhibition to the modern world. "The Centre will provide a wide range of teaching, learning and research opportunities for schools, students and communities to learn about the Holocaust, explore how it happened and its relevance for today."

In addition to a major Heritage Lottery Fund Award and its AJR grant, the new Centre has received support from the University of Huddersfield, the Pears Foundation, the Toni Schiff Memorial Fund, plus a number of firms and patrons.

AJR Chief Executive Michael Newman attended the official opening event and wrote "Congratulations to all those involved in creating the Holocaust Heritage and Learning Centre that has opened at the University of Huddersfield. The interactive section, auditorium and well curated panels comprise a highly impressive resource that has the critical backing of the university.

"Seeing the stories of some of our members made me think of the timeliness of this new centre. While some are sadly no longer with us, their experiences have been captured there in perpetuity. People such as John Chillag, a survivor of Buchenwald, who had the fate to be in the same iconic picture as Elie Wiesel taken at liberation.

"Happily, others portrayed there are still here. Martin Kapel, who was deported to Poland from Germany before coming on a

Kindertransport, spoke movingly at the end of the opening of the exhibition about the importance of teaching the subject of the Holocaust for future generations."

The opening of the new centre cements the AJR's contribution as one of the leading benefactors, reflecting our developing role as support of Holocaust educational and commemorative projects.

Meanwhile Huddersfield is not the only destination in the north of England where people can learn about the Holocaust. The North Yorkshire market town of Thirsk has just opened its first "peace memorial" which celebrates the work of Jed Hall, the Quaker owner of the now defunct B Smith's department store in Thirsk. Hall was awarded a medal by the League of Nations for his humanitarian work after the Armistice when he took lorry loads from Thirsk to Vienna as part of his mission to heal the wounds of war.

In Vienna he befriended the family of Oscar Schindler, and brought two of Oscar's sisters back to Thirsk to recuperate. Although no one can say for certain what prompted Oscar's own humanitarian efforts it is likely that one kindness led to another.

The Thirsk memorial also commemorates the Quakers role in welcoming 12,000 refugees in the 1930s including, of course, through the Kindertransport. Local Quakers continue to work tirelessly for peace and reconciliation while Nina Hall, a descendent of Jed's, became Boutros Boutros Ghali's Health Adviser at the United Nations.

**Jo Briggs**

## FITTING TRIBUTE TO MAJOR FRANK



The Duke of Cambridge with the new statue of Frank Foley

A new statue in Stourbridge honours the life of Major Frank Foley, who risked his life to save 10,000 Jews from near-certain death in Europe.

The statue was unveiled by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge in the presence of a large crowd of local dignitaries.

Frank Foley was an MI6 agent who went undercover in Nazi Germany as a passport officer and who, at great personal risk, managed to secure visas for thousands of Jews to leave Germany for safety in the UK. He retired to Stourbridge in 1949, never speaking publicly about his actions before he died in 1958.

In 1999, he was recognised by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations, and in the same year his story was brought to light by author Michael Smith in *'The Spy who saved 10,000 Jews'*.



Major Frank Foley

# Thank you Fritz

Among the many milestone anniversaries we commemorate this year is the 50th anniversary of the passing of Fritz Bauer, the German prosecutor who brought many Nazis to justice and worked so hard to make sure the world would never forget.



Bauer, who was from a middle-class Stuttgart Jewish family, became Germany's youngest judge in 1930 at the age of 27. He was sent to a concentration camp when the Nazis came to power in 1933 and released nine months later after being coerced into signing a statement pledging obedience to Nazi rule. He fled to Denmark and eventually escaped to Sweden where he lived out the rest of the war.

When Bauer returned to his native country in 1949, he found a West Germany in which many Third Reich values were still admired. Former Nazis held key positions in government. The closest aide and national security adviser to the then Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was Hans Globke, a former Nazi government member who helped draw up Nazi race laws.

Antisemitism was still so prevalent that Bauer hid the fact that he was Jewish to avoid being labelled a traitor who was "bent on revenge". West Germany also still enforced Nazi-era laws outlawing homosexuality and Bauer lived in fear of being publicly denounced and ousted from his job because he was gay.

In 1956 Bauer was appointed chief public

prosecutor of the State of Hesse, a time during which former Nazis still held important government positions in the country. Fully aware of the environment and difficulty of the task, yet determined to obtain at least a modicum of justice for those persecuted during the war, Bauer commenced legal proceedings in Frankfurt against a number of former second and third tier SS officers and guards who had served at Auschwitz.

Bauer's Auschwitz trials helped to ensure that Germany was made to collectively confront its guilt, and that individuals faced up to their personal involvement in – or fatal indifference to – the crimes of the then not-so-distant past.

At a ceremony held recently in Frankfurt, President Steinmeier honored Bauer, who "barely received support and experienced little recognition" in Germany, as an "enlightener," a passionate man who was not afraid to argue for what he knew was right. Bauer's fight for justice and democracy during the difficult post-war period – when the country was not all that interested in mea culpas – has helped to shape the public's understanding of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust.

# Letters to the Editor

The Editor reserves the right to shorten correspondence submitted for publication.

**NOTE FROM EDITOR: The following letter was addressed to the AJR's Social Work team:**

Dear Mrs. Jones, I am herewith enclosing the Home Care Scheme claim form.

Hoping this time I have got it right. Filling in forms is such a plight. My brain is not geared in that direction – Consequently suffers from acute fraction. However, I am trying my best. When all is done I take a little rest. Where would we be without your aid? Into oblivion we would fade.....

*Gerty Fagleman, Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

## ULTERIOR MOTIVES AT THE GREEN PARK HOTEL

Your wonderfully nostalgic article about the late Green Park Hotel in Bournemouth omitted one of its main functions – the bringing together of nice young Jewish lads and lasses every Sunday.

While still in the army I was lured there in all ignorance for a long weekend leave by a plotting aunt and uncle. How I escaped the machinations of a dozen determined Jewish mothers unscathed I will never know, but for a serving soldier the luxury was sheer bliss and remains a happy memory.

*Hans Eirew, Manchester*

## AJR'S NEXT GENERATION

I wholeheartedly support Charlotte Balazs' letter in September's journal about the importance of the AJR incorporating second generation participants into the events which it so thoughtfully arranges for its refugee members.

There was some discussion with Jo Briggs, editor of the AJR Journal, about this at the recent AJR lunch in Alyth Gardens and how the journal itself may have to focus more emphatically on future generations, if it is to survive.

Informal events could possibly be arranged with second or even third generation people in mind, meeting over coffee/lunch,

as well as through commemorative and novel events.

Meanwhile the Berlin/London Bike ride, completed by Michael and Lee Bibring, reported in your September issue was a wonderful example of intergenerational experience. All too often I find the reflective stories of contributors extremely interesting but somehow sadly not always connecting with the generations which have followed. In these nervous and uncertain times I do think we need more linking up.

*Yvonne Klemperer, London NW6*

**NOTE FROM EDITOR: The AJR is keen to reach as many descendants of Holocaust survivors and refugees as possible. If you have any suggestions as to how we can make the AJR Journal – or indeed the wider services of the AJR – more relevant for second and third generations please let us know.**

## SOMETHING MISSING IN BRNO

In suggesting that I should have contacted the 'thriving' Jewish community in Brno before going, Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein misunderstands the point of my article.

The ways in which civic authorities of a town or city choose to remember publicly and commemorate the loss of so many of their Jewish townfolk during WW2 are always revealing. Such reminders are of course not primarily intended for the benefit of Jewish visitors, but rather as a statement to both its residents and all those who come from outside, Jewish and otherwise.

The mis-sited, neglected and inexplicable Holocaust memorial in Brno speaks volumes: likewise its poor-looking synagogue, which lacks any identifying sign – or even a mezuzah on its front door – to identify it as such. There are no street signs anywhere which help the visitor find these out-of-centre locations. The local tourist office staff knew nothing of the city's Jewish sites. The local tourist guide did not mention any events relating to WW2. There remains something missing in Brno.

*David Wirth, London SE21*

## KINDERTRANSPORT INSPIRATION

In response to David Herman's insights on the 80th anniversary of the Kindertransport (September) I would like to add my thanks to Bertha Leverton.

That the Kindertransport is such a well-known part of Holocaust history in this country and around the world is due largely to Bertha Leverton's inspiration, passion and talents. From the moment the idea of holding a 50th year reunion of 'Kinder' dropped into her head as she sat knitting a shawl for a new grandchild, she started the whole thing off, calling on one or two close friends to help with the massive task of contacting Kinder worldwide via advertisements in newspapers, covering expenses with her own money. Thereafter, she and her dedicated small team devoted their time to creating and nurturing every aspect of the public profile of the Kindertransports as we know them: too numerous to list.

*Hanna Nyman, London W1*

## IS WAR ESSENTIAL?

I wonder if anyone else listening to the five Reith lectures this year on the subject of "War" under the title of "*The Mark of Cain*" was also moved by them?

Margaret MacMillan gave these lectures, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 from five different venues, each encapsulating aspects of war – starting in the Imperial War Museum in London and ending in a museum in Ottawa, Canada. She is Canadian herself and has an inspiring style of delivery.

The programmes were extremely far-reaching, fascinating and thought-provoking but deeply, deeply disturbing. MacMillan suggests that war is an essential part of being human and goes into vivid detail to explore all aspects of it: how it affects humanity, soldiers, civilians and politics to the way we remember, commemorate, triumph over it and mourn, including the use we make of art to find beauty in it and especially the use of music both in war and afterwards. No stone is left unturned.

War has been most certainly a large part of human history. The capacity to take any and every role in war is there in the human make-up of each of us. But I cannot accept that it is an essential part, even though it is a part of our human nature that many people develop and even enjoy developing and being involved in. Our human nature provides us with a vast range of capacities to cover all the situations and experiences we are likely to meet in our lives. We can't and never do develop them all in our lifetime. We take part in choosing which capacities we develop, even if we imagine we have no choice.

I regard the human race as only half-civilised as yet. We have come a long way from the time of cave-dwellers and we still have a long way to go. A civilised human race would not deliberately kill its own members. The quality of a community's civilisation is best judged by how it treats the most vulnerable sections of its members and how responsible individuals are in protecting those in danger and actively protesting at injustice.

Ruth Barnett, London NW6

**NOTE FROM EDITOR: This year's Reith lectures were indeed very thought provoking. Do you personally think war is an essential part of humanity?**

#### LABOUR AND ANTISEMITISM

I cannot agree with the behaviour of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC) and the Community Security Trust (CST). I feel they make accusations without quoting any evidence, such as their claim that Jewish members of the Labour Party always remain under suspicion.

In my experience during 72 years of Labour Party membership the opposite is the case.  
Eric Sanders, London SW16

#### ERRATA

Thank you to the reader who called to point out the mistake in our review of *A Lost Inheritance* by John Buck Rochart (September). The artist Albert Schaefer-Ast

was indeed born in 1890 (not 1980) in Wuppertal.

Jo Briggs

#### POWERFUL WORDS

**We are grateful to Leslie Kleinman BEM for sharing the text of a talk he gave over Rosh Hashanah with readers of the AJR Journal. Apart from its amusing opening, it contains a powerful message:**

*One Shabbos morning, Rabbi Levy noticed seven-year-old David staring up at the large plaque hanging in the shul lobby. It was covered with names and small flags were mounted on either side of it. David had been staring at the plaque for some time, so Rabbi Levy walked over to him and said quietly, "Shabbat shalom, David."*

*"Shabbat shalom, Rabbi," replied David. "Rabbi, what is this?"*

*"Well, David, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service."*

*Then little David, in a whisper, asked, "Which service, Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur?"*

Friends, as you know I am a survivor of Auschwitz Birkenau. The largest death camp in world history. A place that murdered over 1.2 million of our brothers and sisters. Men, women and children whose only crime was that they were born as Jews.

In a few moments we are about to blow the shofar. 74 years ago the world was at war.

It was Rosh Hashanah 1944. A man by the name of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, an important Hungarian Rabbi, managed to smuggle a Shofar into Auschwitz.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah he risked his life and went around the camp sounding the shofar at the various barracks.

That month a group of over a thousand young boys had been assigned to the block to be gassed. They begged the Rabbi to come sound the shofar for them so they could at least perform the Mitzvah before they died.

Despite fears for his own safety he agreed, begging the Kapo to warn him if the SS were coming. Before sounding the Shofar he cited the verse in Tehilim that refers to the shofar being sounded when the moon is concealed, saying "the Jewish people, who are compared to the moon, are in a difficult state. But even then we blow the shofar, declaring our faith in G-d.

"Boys, the Talmud says that even when a sword is hanging over us we do not stop praying to G-d for salvation."

Fast forward 74 years. Rosh Hashanah 2018.

Almost all Jews now live where they are free to practise as Jews by the government or society around them. Yet, while those boys at the mouth of the gas chambers begged to hear the shofar, sadly we have thousands of Jews today who don't know what it means to be a Jew.

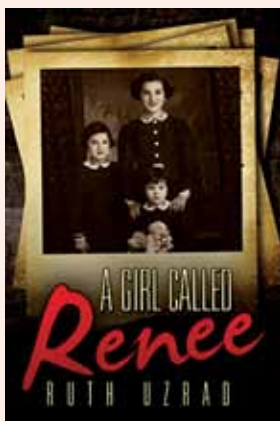
Friends, those boys entered the gas chambers where every type of Jew was killed. Religious, secular, Chassidic, Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Hitler knew we were all one family.

The shofar is there to wake us up – to reflect and improve. To become better and more focused people. To do what is right!

So this year, as we hear the shofar let us pay attention to the haunting echo of those shofar blasts in Auschwitz. Let us remember the commitment and last will and testament of those boys. Let us appreciate our freedom to hear the shofar without any risk of harm. And more important, understand that this year we will try – harder than ever – to look for the good in every Jew.

Every Jew is our brother and sister. Auschwitz taught us that lesson – we dare not forget it!

# REVIEWS



## A GIRL CALLED RENÉE

By Ruth Uzrad

Amazon ISBN 9781976314506

I hope your readers will forgive me if this review of a memoir “A Girl Called Renée” is not entirely objective, as the author, Ruth Uzrad, was my beloved older sister who passed away in Israel in her 90th year. The memoir was first published in Hebrew and I had a hand in correcting and co-editing the English translation.

Ruth describes in vivid language her early years in Berlin within the embrace of a very loving and close religious family, the advent of Nazism in 1933 which she experienced as a primary school girl, the arrest and deportation of our father, in October 1938, together with 17.000 other Polish nationals which was the precursor to Kristallnacht.

Realising that life in Berlin was becoming precarious for Jews, our mother took the very brave decision to illegally join us on to a Kindertransport leaving for Belgium, without visas or a family to receive us.

When Belgium was invaded in 1940 our hostel of 50 girls, joined a group of 50 Jewish boys to escape to South-West France, where we were eventually accommodated in a disused Château. In 1943, after a brief imprisonment in the Camp de Vernet, Ruth realised that she had to go underground in order to survive. She describes her loneliness, longing for her family, a normal life and hunger. She writes about the hard

work she had to undertake in order to earn enough for her daily sustenance, but also about the comradeship and joie de vivre she found on joining a Zionist Youth Group, under the assumed name of Renée. Their activities in the Resistance were primarily to save Jewish children by smuggling them across the border into Switzerland. In an act of extreme courage, Ruth describes dressing up as a Gestapo officer in order to rescue a Jewish baby from an orphanage and taking her to a safe house. Being hunted by the Germans after this heroic act, Ruth writes about her incredibly difficult and hazardous escape across the Pyrenees to safety in Spain and finally being given permission to take a boat leaving for Palestine; for the realisation of her life-long dream to make a new life for herself and help in the creation of the nascent State of Israel.

This book was written from memory, after a lapse of some 50 years, without the help of any written records or dairies. Through the eyes of a teenager, it shows a different and less well known aspect of the Holocaust and of those who had to call on amazing depths of inner strength to survive. Once started, this book is hard to put down.

*Betty Bloom*

## ŽIDIA V ŽILINE (JEWS IN ŽILINA)

10th volume of the series History of Žilina

By Peter Frankl and Pavel Frankl, Edis

press – University of Žilina, 2008

ISBN 978-80-554-0022-8

## ŽIDIA V ŽILINE– OSOBNOSTI (JEWS IN ŽILINA – PERSONALITIES)

by Peter Frankl, Žilina Jewish Religious

Community, Žilina County & EZRA

Foundation

Žilina 2018

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Žilina, the city in the north west of Slovakia, has today some 80,000 inhabitants. In the 1930s out of a population of about 12,000 approximately 14% were Jews, today only a handful remain. These two books are both written in Slovak, the first with an English and Hebrew summary; they present an historically important contribution to the memory and understanding of the role that Jews made to life in Žilina, and beyond the borders of Slovakia.

The historical volume begins with the chapter dealing with Jewish life in Žilina prior to 1918, the year of the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic. The next chapter describes life in Žilina between the two world wars. This is intertwined with a chapter entitled ‘A walk around the town’. The following chapter deals with the social and political realities of the years 1938-1945 with its hugely tragic outcome. The authors go on to describe the role the Jews of Žilina played in the resistance to both the Slovak and Nazi regimes. This theme continues with the description of how some members of the community survived the horrors of this period. After the war there was a new beginning for those who survived and the authors describe the life of the Jewish community under the democratic republic (1945-1948), then under the ‘socialist’ regime, including the emigrations of 1946 and 1968. The historical descriptions conclude with chapters on Jews in Žilina schools and their involvement in sports and physical culture. In addition to the index and source references there are short biographical descriptions of some of Žilina Jewish personalities. There are two indices of names at the end of this volume: names of those buried in the Žilina Jewish cemetery; and the names of Holocaust victims of Žilina and its near surroundings.

In the second book Peter Frankl expands some thirty or so life stories of Žilina Jewish personalities, one of which is that of my father. These stories range from those of international sportsmen, religious leaders, lawyers, businessmen, artists, scientists and architects amongst others.

The Frankl brothers’ approach to the historical material, literature and witness interviews is both detailed and scholarly. Both volumes use well researched and referenced source materials, with photographs and printed documents. As they write in the forward “...we will publish only verifiable facts and events, nothing else...” and they have succeeded in this. These two volumes are highly readable and form a significant addition to the history of the Jews of Slovakia.

*Michael Schlesinger*



# ART NOTES: by Gloria Tessler

The Mexican artist Frida Kahlo suffered from polio as a child and lived and worked in agony, encased in a corset to prevent her spine collapsing, and with a prosthetic leg, after her own was amputated due to gangrene. In the V & A's exhibition: *Frida Kahlo: Making Herself Up*, the *pièce de résistance* is a cabaret of colourful Tehuana embroidered waistcoats, blouses and woven shawls (*rebozos*).

The 2004 discovery of Kahlo's effects, hidden in a sealed room for 50 years after her death, revealed a treasure trove of unseen photographs, documents and other memorabilia.

But the grand room with the dresses, mounted V & A style, is not the sum of its parts: there are tiny pots of rouge, powder and paint, medicine bottles, the prosthetic leg in a high, decorated red boot, the ugly corset on which she based a self portrait with a classical column for a spine. In her diary she drew the amputated leg alongside the words: "Feet: what do I need them for if I have wings to fly?" The woman who abhorred Catholicism but loved its drama, compared her severed leg to Christ's feet nailed to the cross, and used Catholic imagery in her work.

There is a magic realism about Kahlo, the woman who created an image out of her own fatalism. She has been likened to a dead Aztec queen, and there is death marked all about her, like a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel: her roller-coaster marriage to the muralist Diego Rivera, the magic of the Blue House (Casa Azul) in Mexico City where she grew up



*Kahlo with an Olmeca figurine, Coyoacán 1939*

and lived all her life, which became an international artistic hub, and finally her death in 1954 at the age of 47.

Her father, Mexican-born photographer, Guillermo Kahlo allowed her to help in his dark room, nourishing her creative spirit. In 1929, at 22 she married Rivera. He was 41. Theirs was a turbulent union; they married, divorced and remarried. She went with Rivera to the USA for the first time in 1936, which she called Gringoland, celebrated with a painting of her on a plinth waving a flag.

But the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 had lent power to its heritage and culture and she totally embraced Tehuana traditional dress, plaiting her hair and braiding flowers into it. She created her own version of *Mexicanidad*, with her slight, mannish moustache and single eyebrow both emphasising and disturbing her beauty. She may have become, through the eyes of Madonna, who collected her, a totem for the feminist movement, but the society she represented was intensely matriarchal.

I would have liked to see more of Kahlo's primitive and totemic art here. She has

never been short of exhibitions and this year alone she features in shows on Mexican Modernism all over the world. The iconic portrait of her in a white lace headdress like a Tudor queen with a ruff and Rivera's image stamped on her brow like a spoken word stands out here.

No doubt she was regarded as subversive. Andre Breton described her as ribbon around a bomb. She was also a muse for other artists. Whether in her own or other peoples' paintings, her image is blank, non-expressive, surrounded by primary colours. Essentially Frida Kahlo was the poster girl for all things Tehuana.

The show runs until November 4.

## Annely Juda Fine Art

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CONTEMPORARY  
PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

# Not one, not two, but three remarkable tributes



Monica Bohm lighting candles for her grandparents in Berlin



Stolpersteine in Berlin for Monica's grandparents

**In May 2014, my wife Monica and I were due to travel to Berlin for a business conference and Monica decided that she would like to visit the house in Zehlendorff where her father, John Lennard, grew up before the war. She had seen the outside already, but wanted to see inside, so that she could try to picture his early life, with his parents and brother.**

She googled the address at Forststrasse 31; imagine her surprise when a picture came up showing a pair of *Stolpersteine* in commemoration of her paternal grandparents, Georg and Margarete Lövy. She immediately wrote to the address and there followed a rapid and surprising voyage of discovery which culminated a week later in a visit to the house. The occupants allowed us to wander round and Monica was able to fulfil her dream of seeing where her father grew up.

It transpired that responsibility for the *Stolpersteine* lay with the family next door. Their 17 year old son's teacher had, the previous year, given his class a research project on the subject of Holocaust victims in the area and the boy had discovered that the family next door, Monica's grandparents, had been victims.

The story, in brief, was that, having managed to send their sons to England, in 1938 they had fled to Rotterdam and illusory safety. However, in 1943 they were deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.

In 2012, having discovered these facts, the young non-Jewish schoolboy next door persuaded his parents to pay for a permanent memorial so that whoever walked past the house should be reminded of the dreadful fate met by its occupants. A ceremony was organised, a leaflet produced with brief biographies and a psalm recited, all without our knowledge, because they couldn't trace the children or grandchildren, probably because they had changed their name to Lennard. My wife and I lit candles by the stones on the pavement one dark November evening and stood silently trying to picture the grandparents she

never knew and her father and his brother, innocent and carefree, riding their bikes in that beautiful road.

Galvanised by this event, I turned my attention to the possibility of laying *Stolpersteine* outside the apartment block at 60 Klosterneuburgstrasse, in the 20th district of Vienna, where my paternal grandparents, Gitl and Manele Böhm, had lived before they were murdered (my grandfather in Buchenwald and later, my grandmother in Minsk). There followed another unexpected sequence of events.

In April 2015, in the course of my research, I contacted an organisation called *Steine der Erinnerung* (see Anthony Grenville's article in the March AJR Journal) to find out how this could be done. To my amazement they informed me that, by a remarkable coincidence, a resident of that block was in the advanced stages of organising the production of a commemorative plaque in memory of the residents of No.60 who had perished in the Holocaust. They put me in touch with him. He was about to give final instructions for production of the plaque, which contained the details of 10 victims who had lived



Peter, Jessica & Monica Bohm outside the house in Amersfoort where Peter's aunt Doris lived



Commemorative plaques in Vienna for Peter's grandparents

there. However, he was unaware of my grandparents. I was able to provide him with their details just in time for them to be included.

Subsequently, in October 2016, my brother David and I, accompanied by our wives and seven other family members made the trip to Vienna to participate in a memorable ceremony, organised by *Steine der Erinnerung*, taking in five separate venues and attended by local dignitaries and family members from as far away as Australia. Life stories were told and we recited Kaddish. This was such a moving experience and we would not have been able to participate, had it not been for the remarkable turn of events the previous year. We were also invited to go inside the next door apartment and were able to get an idea of what it was like inside that of my grandparents.

This was not the end of the series of surprises. In March this year, my first cousin Michael, who lives in Manchester, received out of the blue an email from a lady in Amersfoort (Holland) informing him that a ceremony was scheduled to take place the following week in Amersfoort, memorialising five members of our

family, amongst others, including our aunt Doris Löwendorff, who perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau, aged 19, in 1944. Through their research, they had only just traced my cousin. As a result, he, my brother and two other family members travelled to Amersfoort the next week to attend another exceptional ceremony, taking in 11 houses in a beautiful district and attended by a large number of locals and relatives. There were printed biographies and Kaddish was recited outside each house by the family or otherwise by a local survivor. Doris had latterly lived there with her uncle and aunt and their children, having fled from Germany, but tragically was unable to escape the Nazis. Doris's younger brother, Michael's father Werner, was hidden by non-Jewish families in Holland and later moved to England. Her elder sister, my mother Ruth, came to Oldham in 1939 as a domestic. We never knew our aunt Doris and now, after all these years, there is a tangible memorial to her and, at long last, we were able to pay our silent respects.

What was most amazing about these stories was not that the commemoration ceremonies took place but that, in each

case, they were the result of devoted efforts by wonderful, respectful and dedicated non-Jewish people who had no connection with the victims concerned, but who were determined that the individuals, and what befell them, should be remembered. In each case, we were truly humbled by their efforts and dedication. At a time of such uncertainty and negativity in the world, it is inspiring to know that there are so many decent people who are determined that the world should never forget what happened in Europe during that terrible period.

One final note – whilst standing outside the house in Amersfoort, a neighbour emerged with a single crystal glass wrapped in tissue paper. He said that it had come from his parents, who lived in the same road. Doris's uncle and aunt had given a set of glasses to his parents for safekeeping and return, the night before they were taken by the Nazis and deported. Now, after so many years, he wanted to return the remaining glass to its rightful owners! To hold that in my hands and feel the connection sent an enormous shiver down my spine!

**Peter Bohm**

# Around the AJR

*Most of these reports are summaries of much longer reviews which, due to lack of space, we are unable to include in their entirety. If you would like further information on the actual event please contact either the author or the AJR regional co-ordinator.*

## EDINBURGH

We thoroughly enjoyed Daniel Cainer's delightful show at the Edinburgh Fringe and the sun came out in time for us to be able to sit outside for coffee and to soak up the Festival atmosphere.

Lilian Bell

## PINNER

Nearly 40 members enjoyed a very sunny tea party but withdrew to the shade of our hosts' home for a sing-along to familiar songs.

Henri Obstfeld

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## OUTING TO WESTCLIFF

AJR members enjoyed a wonderful day out at Westcliff-on-Sea, with a fish and chip lunch and ice cream. Some bravely paddled in the sea whilst others enjoyed the deckchairs.

Susan Harrod

## KINDER LUNCH

Kinder were delighted to hear from James Bulgin, Head of Content for the new Holocaust Galleries at the Imperial War Museum.

Susan Harrod

## SECOND GENERATION BARBECUE

Anthea and Jeff hosted us all in their beautiful garden where our guest speaker discussed present day historical revisionism which seeks to erase Polish anti-Jewish complicity in the Shoah. She also provided insights about why some Jewish people returned to Poland after WW2.

Elaine Angell



## HULL

We were all delighted to celebrate Olive Rosner's special birthday and congratulate Ian Le Boutillier (2nd Gen) on his Grade 8 piano certificate.

Veronika Keczkas

## SEPTEMBER GROUP EVENTS

All AJR members are welcome at any of these events; you do not have to be affiliated to that particular group. As the exact timings of these events are often subject to last minute changes we do not include them in the AJR Journal and suggest you contact the relevant regional contact for full details.

Ilford	3 October	Marcus Ferrar –The Budapest House
Pinner	4 October	Desert Island Discs – members' own choices
Prestwich	8 October	Social get-together
Essex (Westcliff)	9 October	Claude Vecht-Wolf The Beatles – Part 1
Wessex	9 October	Helen Banham – The Jews of Winchester
Edinburgh	11 October	Social get-together
Newcastle	14 October	Speaker – Nigel Goodrich
Edgware	16 October	David Barnett: Tea Shops and Corner Houses – the Story of Joe Lyons
Radlett	17 October	David Barnett: Tea Shops and Corner Houses – the Story of Joe Lyons
Nottingham	18 October	Lunch at the home of Bob & Gerry Norton
Bath Bristol	22 October	David Jewell, Foundation of International Development for Family Medicine in Palestine
Dundee	23 October	V&A Museum in Dundee
Birmingham	24 October	Social get-together
Didsbury	24 October	Social get-together
Book Club	24 October	Social get-together
Muswell Hill	25 October	Dr Susan Cohen on Eleanor Rathbone
Glasgow Book Club	25 October	Book Club Meeting
North London	25 October	David Barnett – Tea Shops and Corner Houses – The Story of Joe Lyons
Leeds CF	29 October	Julie Moore – Magistrate
Cheshire	30 October	Social get-together
North West London	30 October	Neil Taylor of Maccabi GB
Norwich	30 October	Social get-together

# LOOKING FOR?

The AJR regularly receives messages from members and others looking for people or help in particular subjects. Here are some of the most recent requests – please get in touch directly with the person concerned if you can help in any way.

## GERMAN NATIONALITY CLAIMS

Oliver Marshall is researching the subject of German nationality restoration claims propelled by the 2016 Brexit referendum result and is keen to interview people of any generation who have submitted a claim (whether pending, successful or rejected). He would also like to interview people who might be eligible but, for whatever reason, have decided not to claim.

[oliverdmarshall@gmail.com](mailto:oliverdmarshall@gmail.com)

## FAMILY KALLMANN FROM UPPER SILESIA

Yvonne Baur is seeking details about the descendants of Dr Erich, Walter, Arnold, Fritz or Kurt Kallmann from Gleiwitz, who all came to England in the 1930s. Her father Walter Janik was a family friend.

[editorial@ajr.org.uk](mailto:editorial@ajr.org.uk)

## GERDA HOPP FROM BERLIN

Gerda Hopp (born 20 November, 1916) was placed with Rebecca Paster's Grandparents during the war. Sadly, she ended her life aged just 23 after learning that her father had died in a concentration camp. Rebecca hopes to find out where she is buried.

[rebecca.paster@ba.com](mailto:rebecca.paster@ba.com)

## ANDREAS BRAUM

Anne Holland has letters belonging to her husband's grandmother (Mary Artiss) concerning taking in Andreas Braun, born 12 Nov 1930 in Berlin. He was transported in 1939, possibly on the SS Manhattan. She is keen to share them with his descendants.

[anne.holland@live.com.au](mailto:anne.holland@live.com.au)



## LISL WOLFF / SCHLOMANN FROM ROSTOCK

Hannah Gau, a student in her final year at school in Rostock, north east Germany, is researching the fate of Lisl Schломann/Wolff (mother of Harry Schломann, deported to Theresienstadt in 1942).

Lisl fled to the UK prior to WW2 and married George Wolff.  
[hannah-gau@web.de](mailto:hannah-gau@web.de)

## SUE SAYER / CRONER / SCHAMJUK

David Aprahamian Liddle is keen to contact any friends of his very dear family friend, Susanne Sayer, formerly Croner, formerly Schmajuk, born 28 September 1927, who is now living in a care home.

[dliddle@waitrose.com](mailto:dliddle@waitrose.com) or 020 8365 7320

## JEWISH GIRLS SCHOOL IN GENESEN, POSEN

This photo was taken at the Jewish Girls High School class in Genesen, Posen, in October 1919. John Martin, whose aunt Kate Schmalz is standing fifth from the left on the front row, is keen to hear from descendants of anyone else in the photo.

[johnwmartins1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:johnwmartins1@hotmail.co.uk)

## ROSALIE HEIMANN

Axel Huber and Kathy Miller are hoping to find more information about Rosalie Heimann, who was born 2 June 1899 in Bosatz near Ratibor and who died 6 December 1997 in Bournemouth.

[hubers\\_axel@web.de](mailto:hubers_axel@web.de)

## LEEDS CONTINENTAL FRIENDS

At our annual summer party we were joined by members from Hull and Bradford and entertained by the talented pianist and vicar, Roger Quick.

*Barbara Cammerman*



# Antisemitism and Christianity in Europe

The Labour Party's row over antisemitism lasted for the whole summer and even now continues to hit the headlines. But political furore over antisemitism is far from new. AJR member Dr. Elena Rowland shares a potted history of antisemitism in Christian Europe.

The first clear examples of antisemitism can, of course, be traced back to Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE but it was not until the birth of Christianity that Jews became the object of religious intolerance and political oppression throughout Europe.

Jesus' disciples were Jews but they were keen to attract believers from the non-Jewish world to get approval from the Roman Authorities. At first, Christianity was a persecuted branch of Judaism but it later became a dominant religion of the Roman Empire and helped to fuel anti-Jewish sentiment.

In Russia in the mid-14th century, Jews were blamed for political turmoil, for the epidemic of Black Death, forced to live in ghettos, banned from certain professions and targeted in pogroms. Fleeing from persecution in one country, they were unwelcome immigrants in another, waiting to be expelled again.

In Spain in 1492, King Ferdinand expelled Jews but converts could stay. However, they were regarded as a Christian with 'Jewish blood' who could not be trusted.

In Germany in 1542 Martin Luther

wrote a pamphlet "Against Jews and their Lies", encouraging Christians to burn their synagogues. It is clear that antisemitism fermented through centuries with Christianity often used as a tool to justify hatred of Jews.

In the 20th century, Nazi pseudoscience made a definition of 'Jewish race' such as typical facial features, shape of nose, length of skull. Their theory opened the door to systematic persecution and extermination of Jews who, thanks to Nazi propaganda, had become broadly regarded as communists, child killers, criminals, parasites and manipulators. At the heart of everything were the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, stripping German Jews of their citizenship, forbidding sexual relationships between Jews and Aryans, and disregarding conversions to Christianity.

Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Parelli) was elected in 1939. Despite the fact that the Nuremberg Laws directly conflicted with many of the laws of the Catholic Church he failed to challenge the Nazis about the atrocities that were by now happening across Europe. Many critics now view Pius XII as a secret Nazi sympathiser; the writer John Cornwell dubbed him the 'Hitler Pope' because of his failure to openly denounce the treatment of Jews. However, others argue that his hands were tied, as he was scared of communism and feared that the Nazis would eventually invade the neutral Vatican as well.

In fact, despite the Pope's public indifference, the Vatican sheltered hundreds of Jews and Pius XII intervened to release some arrested Jews. Sadly, though, many people did not get this protection.

One high profile Christian who was abandoned by the Church was the philosopher, thinker and active feminist Edith Stein. Born on 12 October 1891

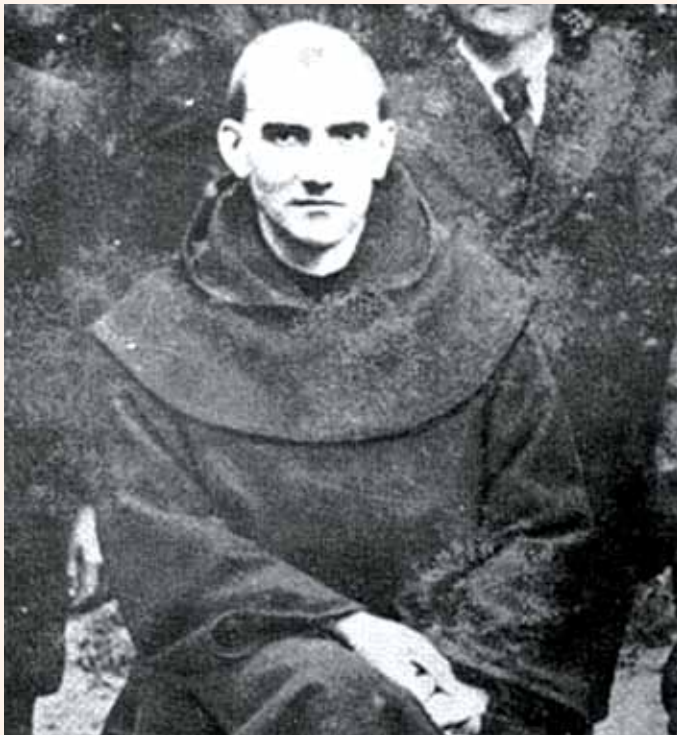
in Breslau, now Wroclaw, Edith grew up in a large Orthodox Jewish family where her widowed mother was the sole provider. Edith loved and respected her mother but became an atheist in her teens. She studied the new discipline of 'phenomenology', which became a tool in search of spirituality, and then – unusually for a woman in those days – taught at the University of Freiburg until 1918.

In 1921 she converted to Christianity and was baptised in the following year. She secured a teaching post at St Mary Magdalene School in Germany where her knowledge, intellect and spirituality influenced many women. She became a voice of "Catholic feminism". She gave many lectures throughout Europe until 1932 when she was invited to start a new programme for young women at the Institute of Scientific Pedagogy, also in Germany.

Unfortunately for her she was not registered as an Aryan, so the Nuremberg Laws prohibited her from holding a teaching post. In April 1933 she had written to Pius XI (predecessor of Pius XII) to speak against the rise of National Socialism and stop this 'abuse in Christ's name' but it is not clear if he even got the letter.

She refused a teaching post in South America, where her brother lived, instead entering into the Catholic Carmelite Order in Cologne in 1934. As Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross she felt secure behind the thick walls of the Convent and returned to her writings.

After Kristallnacht it became clear that she was no longer safe in Germany so she fled, together with her sister Rosa, who had converted in 1936, to another Carmelite Order in Holland. Of course Holland was invaded in May 1940 and in 1941 both sisters were forced to wear the Star of David.



Father Jacques Bunel



Edith Stein

The maltreatment of Jews was condemned by Dutch clergy in a pastoral letter in July 1942. However, in August 1942 the Nazis arrested 1200 Catholics of Jewish descent, among them Edith and Rosa. Both sisters were deported to Auschwitz and gassed.

On 1 May 1987 Edith Stein was proclaimed a martyr of the Roman Catholic Church. In October 1998 she was canonised by Pope John Paul II.

Many writers have argued that she was murdered because of her race rather than her faith. She had many choices but she was an obedient Catholic nun who followed her vows.

Many people have questioned the existence of a God who would allow such a thing to happen. There is a thin line between religious expression in Judaism and Christianity but a huge gap between good and evil. During the Holocaust, greed, lust for power and racial hatred overtook common sense. Political propaganda manipulated people to do evil things to Jews but there were exceptions, when some people put their lives at risk to help persecuted Jews to survive.

One of them was Father Jacques Bunel, born 29 January 1900 into a poor,

devout Catholic family.

Despite his studies being interrupted by WW1 he became an ordained priest in 1925 and entered a Carmelite monastery in 1931.

He was appointed headmaster of The Little School in Avon, where many Jews found shelter, three of them under false identities. In January 1944 he was betrayed and imprisoned in France and subsequently transferred to Mauthausen. Starved and exhausted it was very hard to keep his faith but he made many friends with whom he shared his bread.

The final months in 1945 were the worst and although eventually Mauthausen was liberated, Father Jacques was too sick. He was taken to the hospital in Linz, Austria, where on 2 June he passed away.

His acts of mercy towards Jews and his betrayal was filmed by Louis Malle (*Goodbye, Children*). His suffering, courage and help to Jews were recognised at a special ceremony in 1985 by Yad Vashem, when he was named 'Righteous among Gentiles'.

Father Jacques had deep-rooted faith with an unshakeable belief in humanity. He was a generous and good person who helped everyone. Edith Stein was

a very active intellectual for whom the Church kept silent. Their different faiths led them both to end their lives in extraordinary suffering.

Many ordinary men and women recognised the dangers of Nazi propaganda and antisemitism during WWII and they sheltered Jews, thereby risking their own lives

These two martyrs did not believe in propaganda, which brainwashed human minds and stereotyped the Jews as enemies of Christianity. They listened to their own inner voices and acted according to their consciences.

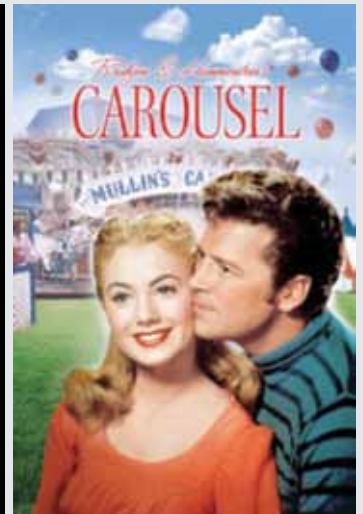
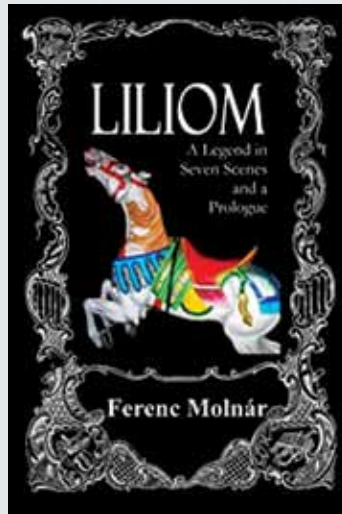
#### Dr. Elena Rowland

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# Ferenc Molnar

The writer Ferenc Molnar was born Ferenc Neuman in Budapest in 1878. He is known for his plays about the contemporary salon life of Budapest and for his moving short stories as well as for his work on *Carousel* and other films. He died in 1952 in New York.



Molnar was born into a non-practising Jewish family and was sent to study law in Geneva but as he spent his time in writing articles for Swiss and Hungarian newspapers he did not complete his studies.

He became a reporter for the *Budapesti Naplo* and was often sent on foreign assignments as he spoke French and German. He spent little time at home because his sister's piano playing disturbed his concentration. Instead he worked on the balcony of the famous New York coffee house in Pest.

His first novel, *The Hungry City*, criticised avarice and dealt with antisemitism. His first play, at the age of 24, was a great success and from then on he was never short of funds. As in his other plays, the villain is not shown without some sympathy.

His first marriage, to Margit Veszi, was a disaster. He was unable to change his very unusual lifestyle and when she was 4 months pregnant, she left him. In this marriage lie the roots of the violence and guilt of the character, Liliom.

His novel *The Pal Street Boys* has as its subject the bravery, tragedy and death of a small, weak boy amongst his schoolmates who play at war on derelict ground in Budapest. The novel has been translated into more than 30 languages and is compulsory reading in Japan, Italy and Poland. If you have not read it yet, do not wait.....

His play *The Devil* is reminiscent of Pirandello. It played simultaneously in four New York theatres: two in English, one in German and one in Yiddish. Of all his 42 plays *Liliom* was the most successful. Puccini asked for the rights to the play but Molnar refused because, he said, people will always remember the name of the composer, but will soon forget the playwright. So how did Rogers and Hammerstein end up with the rights? Molnar went to see their musical *Oklahoma* which he loved and thus the musical, *Carousel* was born. Except for the ending, the text follows Molnar's play virtually word for word.

For a long time he pursued the married actress, Iren Varsanyi. In spite of confessing her love for Molnar to her husband, he would not let her go. A duel followed where, luckily, both parties missed. Next in line of important women in his life was the fantastically popular prima donna, Sari Fedak, with whom he had a 15-year stormy relationship. During WW1 Molnar was away as a reporter and, on his return, friends informed him that Fedak had entertained the troops, mostly in her bed.

His next inamorata was a beautiful 19-year old Jewish actress, Lili Darvas. When Sari Fedak found out, she gave Molnar an ultimatum: either marry me or I will write a book about you. They duly married, she received a generous yearly sum and soon agreed to a divorce. Molnar never settled down with Lili Darvas though they did get married; he said they had a 5-room

apartment: – a room in the Hotel Imperial in Vienna, in the Carlton Hotel in Cannes, the Danieli in Venice, the Adlon in Berlin and the Hungaria in Budapest. In 1939 he left for America and lived in the Plaza Hotel, New York until his death. Darvas also emigrated and often appeared in his plays.

Molnar was followed to New York by his much younger secretary, Vanda Bartha. She too lived in the Plaza but on a different floor. Needless to say, she also became his mistress. Vanda and Darvas later became very good friends.

He continued working, although prone to periods of depression. With the German occupation of Hungary his help to his family had to stop. After suffering two heart attacks he died of cancer. He is buried next to his mistress, Vanda.

On his grave his wife wrote "Sleep now, Liliom". He was violent towards all the women in his life, but in the play *Liliom* he attempts to excuse himself. Liliom gets permission to come down from heaven for just one day to see his wife and daughter. Dressed as a beggar, he steals a star for his daughter on the way. She refuses to accept it. He hits her hand and is sent away. The daughter tells the mother "It didn't hurt – it was like a kiss". She then asks her mother, "Did that ever happen to you?" "Yes, it did" she replies. "It reminds me of your father, Liliom".

Janos Fisher



# A CASE OF MISSED COMMUNICATIONS

The August edition of the AJR Journal contained Mindu Hornick's moving story of commemorations in Hamburg, including one to the victims of the bombing of the *Cap Arcona*.

The former liners, the *Cap Arcona*, the *Deutschland* and the freighter *Thielbeck* ended their days as prison ships.

Information intercepted by Bletchley Park was that the SS leadership, assembled in Flensburg, tried to escape by ship to Norway. That information was passed on to Allied HQ and to the RAF. On 2 May 1945 the Red Cross in Lübeck told the Commander of the British forces that 7,000 to 8,000 prisoners were aboard ships in the Bay of Lübeck and the Swedish and Swiss Red Cross informed British Intelligence of the presence of prison ships

in that Bay. That information was not passed on. Therefore the RAF attacked and sank all 3 ships with Typhoon fighter bombers as part of general strikes on shipping in the Baltic, oblivious of what the ships held below deck. Only 350 of the 5,000 KZ prisoners on the *Cap Arcona* survived. Of the 2,800 prisoners on the *Thielbeck* only 50 were saved. All 2,000 prisoners on the *Deutschland* were safely taken off by the motor launch *Athen*.

German trawlers sent to rescue only the *Cap Arcona* crew saved 16 sailors, 400 SS-men and 20 SS-women.

On the evening of 2 May 1945, more prisoners arriving from KZ Stutthof were loaded into barges and brought to the anchored vessels. The *Cap Arcona* refused them, 800 prisoners were returned to the beach at Neustadt in the morning of 3 May 1945 where some 500 of them were machine-gunned in their barges or beaten



Poster for SS Arcona in her heyday

to death on the beach.

That maritime disaster and the murders on the beach took place just one day before the surrender of German troops to Field-Marshal Montgomery on Lüneburg Heath on 4 May 1945. The SS had planned to sink the ships laden with prisoners anyway, the RAF did it as a result of missed communications.

**Frank Bright**

## So near and yet so far

Two sisters, Sonja Sternberg and Gisela Feldman, were recently invited to Hamburg for the official launch of '*Captain Schroeder: die Irrfahrt der St. Louis*' – a German TV film in which they both took part.

The *St. Louis* was a luxury liner which left Hamburg on 13 May 1939 with over 900 passengers who were fleeing the Nazis. The sisters and their mother were among them.

The purpose of the film was to highlight the bravery and humanity of Captain Schroeder. Many women had brought their candlesticks and the captain bravely allowed them to remove the portrait of Hitler from the wall on Shabbath for prayers.



Sisters Sonja Sternberg (left) and Gisela Feldman, members of Menorah Synagogue, Cheshire.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HOWARD BARLOW

All the passengers had purchased visas at great expense from the Cuban embassy but were shocked when they were refused entry to Havana: The Cuban president had declared the visas invalid. A representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee tried to negotiate, offering extra money for each passenger, but to no avail. The Captain went ashore to see if he could help but without success.

Canada, on being asked if they could take any of the refugees, replied: "None is too many". A telegram to President Roosevelt was ignored; another to Mrs. Roosevelt, asking that at least the children be saved, likewise received no reply.

After seven days the ship was ordered

to leave port and Captain Schroeder decided to take a chance and cruise towards America. Near Florida gun boats came out to make sure that nobody tried to swim ashore and so the ship was forced to return to Europe. Holland, France, Belgium and Britain gave the passengers safe haven and the two sisters and their mother were fortunate to be granted visas for Britain as the other three countries were very soon overrun by the Nazis.

The gathering in Hamburg was very emotional as Sonja and Gisela were the only eyewitnesses able to talk about their experiences on the journey and about the humanity of Captain Schroeder. His name is recorded at Yad Vashem.

# LETTER FROM ISRAEL

BY DOROTHEA SHEFER-VANSON



## CONTROVERSIAL LAW



The furore surrounding Israel's Nation-State Law passed in July by the Knesset has continued

to reverberate throughout Israel and beyond, even reaching the pages of the French daily, 'Le Figaro,' which I read while on holiday in France.

Since I cannot bear to be completely disconnected from Israel, I make sure to have internet connection while I'm away. This may seem somewhat masochistic, but it's such an intrinsic part of my life.

Thus it was that my news updates while in France contained numerous messages condemning the law, claiming that it was contrary to the values enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence and even racist – all things that are anathema to any decent person. Massive demonstrations were held to oppose the law, and there seemed to be widespread condemnation of it, at least among my

friends and many of my relations. No-one can accuse me of being a supporter of Binyamin Netanyahu and his party, but the significance of the article in 'Le Figaro' made me stop and think that perhaps the messages I've been receiving are one-sided, to say the least.

Headed '*The State of Israel Will Not Be Binational!*' (my translation, his exclamation mark), the article, under the byline of François d'Orcival, asserts that the justification for introducing the law is to guarantee the future of the Jewish state. Claiming that the law does not contravene the rights of the various minorities living in Israel but merely affirms the Jewish character of Israel, the writer underlines the confrontation between national identity and multiculturalism that is increasingly prevalent all over the Western world, adding that political opposition is inseparable from demographic evolution.

The sticking point, according to M. d'Orcival, is the difference in the birth rates of Arabs and Jews in Israel. Currently, Jews account for 75 percent of the population and Arabs for 18 percent. But the Palestinian Arabs have said more than once that the weapon with which they will defeat the Jews is their birth-rate, and the difference in those of the two populations

seems to bear this out (4.6 percent as opposed to 3.2).

Under the provisions of the law, the official language of Israel is Hebrew and the official religion is Judaism. In England, America, France and most other Western democracies there is an official language and a majority religion (the British monarch is even the head of the Anglican church), and no-one accuses them of being undemocratic. If the law safeguards the Jewish character of Israel, like M. d'Orcival, I personally see no harm.

In the final analysis, there is no getting away from the fact that there are at least thirty Arab or Muslim countries and only one Jewish one. And we all know what happens when Jews do not have a single country that will accept them in their hour of need. Many, though not all, of the Muslim countries will not allow Jews or even anyone who has ever visited Israel to set foot on their soil. Israel has no such policy regarding members of other religions.

Sometimes it takes an objective outsider to reveal the truth of a situation. I am grateful to François d'Orcival for enabling me to see matters in a different light.

## OBITUARY

### SUSI BECHHOFFER

Born Munich 17 May 1936, Died Rugby 29 April 2018

Rosa, the mother of Susi and her twin, Lotte, was a Jewish domestic servant; their father, Otto, a non-Jewish German, left Munich before they were born.

Working and unable to cope with the demands of two babies, Rosa gave the children to the local orphanage. In 1939, Susi and Lotte were sent to Cardiff on the Kindertransport and taken in by a Baptist minister and his wife.

Susi and Lotte were brought up to believe they were the couple's biological children; they were renamed Grace and Eunice and raised as Christians. In 1945 Lotte fell seriously ill and Susi was sent to boarding school, ostensibly to spare her the stress of her sister's illness but actually to prevent her from hearing local rumours about their background.



Susi Bechhofer and twin sister Lotte aged 3

Susi only discovered her true identity when she came to sit an exam in 1954 and the teacher told her her real name (the name change had never been legally formalised). However, it would be a number of years before she felt able to explore her story. In the meantime, Susi pursued a career in nursing, married and had a son. Lotte's death at the age of 35 in 1971 prompted Susi to research their story. Through relatives in New York she learned that their mother Rosa had died at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943.

Finding out her real identity inspired her to reclaim her birth name of Susi Bechhofer and to talk publicly about her experiences. Her story is told in her books *Rosa's Child* and *Rosa*.

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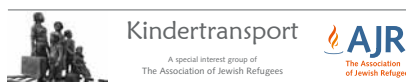
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# CELLIST'S RESEARCH CREATES CONCERT

The family of an AJR Trustee provided the inspiration for a German cellist and the Wiener Library's special *Kristallnacht* and Kindertransport 80th anniversary memorial concert.

Friederike Fechner, who was born in Hannover, has performed chamber music nationally and internationally. Her interest began when she and her husband purchased and renovated a decrepit townhouse in Stralsund on Germany's Baltic coast.

Discovering that the house formerly belonged to a Jewish couple, Selma and Julius Blach, she began researching their descendants. Through a search notice in the AJR Journal she was able to contact several members of the extended Blach family, who met for the first time at a moving event at the German Embassy in London earlier this year.

Among those family members was one of the AJR's own Trustees, Gaby Glassman, who is a great-granddaughter of Selma and Julius and who has also conducted research into the history of the family at the Wiener Library and elsewhere.

Mrs Fechner's determination – by crossing borders, overcoming language and cultural barriers, and carefully reconstructing the complex family tree – struck Wiener Library staff as



Cellist  
Friederike  
Fechner

exceptional, prompting the idea of a special concert on 22 November at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St John's Wood.

Mrs Fechner will be accompanied by Mathias Husmann, a well-known composer, conductor and pianist whose own mother defied the Nazis by playing music of the banned composer Mendelssohn on German radio.

Special guest will be Dame Esther Rantzen, who reunited Czech refugee children with Sir Nicholas Winton in the now historic episode of "This is your Life". The Wiener Library holds papers belonging to Dame Esther's aunt, Jane Levy, the first Jewish relief worker to enter Bergen-Belsen after liberation.

22 November is one day after the 80th anniversary of the Parliament debate that followed *Kristallnacht* and led to the Kindertransport. Candles will be lit in honour of families separated by the terrible events of 1938 and the concert is dedicated to the memory of all those who suffered through them.

Tickets for the concert, which will feature pieces by Beethoven, Bloch, Bruch, Ravel and Mendelssohn alongside readings that connect the story of the Blach family with the wider history of *Kristallnacht*, the *Kindertransport* and the Holocaust, are £30, and are available at [www.wienerlibrary.co.uk](http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk) or **020 7636 7247**. All proceeds will go towards collecting, preserving and sharing evidence of the Holocaust.

## Events and Exhibitions

### BRITISH REFUGEES POLICY DURING WW2

Roger Kershaw from The National Archives and Naomi Levy from The Second Generation Network will talk about the shifting policy of British internment and deportation of German and Austrian Jewish refugees to the Isle of Man, Canada and Australia between 1939-40. They would be delighted to see any memorabilia connected to British internment during WWII, to chat about after the talk.

9 October, 6.30pm

Wiener Library

[www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Whats-On?item=399](http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Whats-On?item=399)

### CAN WE TRUST DEMOCRACY?

AJR Chief Executive Michael Newman will be part of a panel discussion looking at whether we can trust democracy today, in the context of antisemitism in the age of new populism. Organised by the Centre for German Jewish Studies at Sussex University, this event will ask specialists and members of the public to grapple with painful questions such as Why now? What is – or is not – new? Is a second Holocaust possible, this time in the Middle East? What can be done to strengthen democracy and counter anti-democratic tendencies?

1 November 2018 at 7.45pm

New North London Synagogue

[www.mynnl.org.uk/event/Sussex18](http://www.mynnl.org.uk/event/Sussex18)

### KINDERTRANSPORT COMMEMORATION

Lord Alf Dubs and Barbara Winton invite everyone connected to the Kindertransport to the official commemoration event for its 80th anniversary, which is being organised by the Safe Passage movement.

15 November at 3.00pm



Friends Meeting House, London

[kindertransport@safepassage.org.uk](mailto:kindertransport@safepassage.org.uk)

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For the latest AJR news, including details of forthcoming events and information about our services, visit [www.ajr.org.uk](http://www.ajr.org.uk)

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