

AJR journal

Association of Jewish Refugees

The British and the Mandate

Ninety years ago this month, in December 1917, British forces took control of Palestine from the Ottoman Turks. So began the period of the British Mandate, which ended with the War of Independence and the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. Some Jewish commentators portray the years of the Mandate as a heroic era of struggle against the British, out of which the Jewish state was born. But was it quite like that? Did the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine, throw off the yoke of British colonialism as, say, the American colonists did in the late eighteenth century?

The British were hardly involved in the war of 1948: they simply concentrated on extricating themselves from the mess they had created in Palestine. Indeed, the British had formally abandoned authority over Palestine some months previously, when they handed their Mandate to the United Nations. Once they had given up India in 1947, they had no strategic reason for staying in Palestine, no need to safeguard the route to the sub-continent. In 1948 the Jews were not fighting for independence against an occupying or colonial power; they fought the Arabs, who had also been under British rule. For these reasons, it is more accurate to refer to the war of 1948 as the Arab-Israeli War, though less stirring in tone.

Nor had the British Mandate begun in a spirit of conflict between Jewish interests and British rule. On the contrary, it was Britain that proclaimed the establishment of the 'Jewish national home' in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917. Without the protection of a major power, Jews could never have settled in substantial numbers in Palestine; at the time of the Balfour Declaration, they formed about a tenth of the territory's population and would almost certainly have been expelled (or

worse) by the Arab majority once the latter felt threatened by Jewish immigration.

The first High Commissioner, heading the British administration in Palestine, was Herbert Samuel, a leading British politician, a Jew and a convinced Zionist. The second most important figure in the administration, the Chief Secretary, was Wyndham Deedes,



High Commissioner John Chancellor, 1928 (Central Zionist Archive)

a devout Christian who believed profoundly in the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. When he died in 1956, *AJR Information* called him 'a true, dedicated friend' of the Jewish people: 'He was one of the famous company of Englishmen who were inspired by the visions of the Bible. He staunchly believed that it was the privilege of England to help the Jewish people to a new dispensation.' Attorney General Norman Bentwich was another British Jew and Zionist at the apex of the administration.

Evidently, though, British policy was not identical with Zionist interests. The Balfour Declaration itself stated that the Jewish national home was to be established without prejudice to the civil and religious rights of the existing Arab population. In accordance with this, the British strove to balance the rights and interests of the two communities in a reasonably fair and even-handed manner. Neither community saw it like that, of course: both were convinced that Britain favoured the other. Zionists saw any concession to Arab claims, however justified in British

eyes, as disadvantaging their cause – as indeed it did, for their interests and those of the Arabs were fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed.

The Zionist goal – that of building a Jewish community numerous, cohesive and powerful enough economically, politically and militarily to live in security – could be achieved only at the expense of the Arabs, as the latter saw it. The error underlying British policy in Palestine was the refusal to acknowledge that by permitting the establishment of the Jewish national home, they were setting Jews and Arabs on a collision course that made war virtually inevitable. No commissions of inquiry, no white papers, not even the mailed fist of military power could remove this primary cause of conflict: mass Jewish immigration

into Palestine galvanised the Arabs into rejecting Jewish settlement, for all the technological and economic benefits that it promised to bring them.

During the period of the Mandate, the Yishuv undeniably flourished. The Jewish population of Palestine increased by more than tenfold during those years, the Jewish economy was dynamic and progressive, and the Jewish educational system provided a literate, highly skilled workforce for a rapidly modernising society. The Israeli historian Tom Segev has listed the advances made under British rule in his book *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (London: Abacus, 2001): 'The Jews were permitted to purchase land, develop agriculture, and establish industries and banks. The British allowed them to set up hundreds of new settlements, including several towns. They created a school system and an army; they had a political leadership and elected institutions; and with the help of all these they in the end defeated the Arabs.'

continued overleaf

THE BRITISH AND THE MANDATE *continued from page 1*

Plainly, the primary credit for these achievements must go to the Jews themselves. But the British for the most part did nothing to stop them. By contrast, the British allowed Arab society to remain backward and primitive, with a high rate of illiteracy, slow to modernise and to develop an educated political class and an effective political leadership.

Even in the highly contentious area of immigration, British and Zionists co-operated to some extent, at least until the mid-1930s. Initially, the Jewish Agency, the Jewish government-in-waiting, wanted free immigration into Palestine. But Herbert Samuel pointed out that this would also mean free immigration for Arabs; far better, he argued, for the British to agree an annual quota with the Jewish Agency on a bilateral basis, shutting the Arabs out. Though these annual negotiations were often very heated, the quota nevertheless brought one priceless advantage to the Jewish Agency: it could control the process of immigration. Jews who wished to leave their native lands to go to Palestine never went to the nearest British consulate; they went to the local offices of the Jewish Agency, which selected those to be given immigration permits.

That antisemitic attitudes were common among the British in Palestine is beyond doubt. They were part of the casual racism of the day, part of the British sense of superiority over colonial peoples – which included Arabs, despite the romantic attachment of

the British to the free-roaming desert Bedouin. But the British administration in Palestine was bound to follow government policy – and that remained the establishment of the Jewish national home, which favoured the Jews, not the Arabs. The harsh suppression of the Arab rebellion of 1936-39, an episode often overlooked, showed to what lengths the British would go; 25,000 men were sent to Palestine, a very substantial force by interwar standards, and in 1938 General Bernard Montgomery, no less, arrived to command them. The draconian measures adopted against Arab terrorism effectively broke the back of the Arab fighting capacity, thus unintentionally boosting the chances of a Jewish victory a decade later.

In the conflict between the British and the Jews that came to a head after 1945, both sides behaved with a measure of restraint; incidents like the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946 were the exception. The British took the usual measures, imprisoning, interrogating and sometimes executing those convicted of terrorist offences, while also resorting to illegal means like torture, and imposing curfews and forcible searches on the Jewish population, like the notorious 'Black Sabbath' arrests of June 1946. But Jews, however scorned, were Europeans and their lives were not as expendable as those of 'natives'. Nothing the British did in Palestine compares with the massacre of hundreds of peaceful Indian

civilians in Amritsar in 1919, or with the wholesale brutality employed in the suppression of the Mau Mau in Kenya in the 1950s.

The issue that arouses the strongest emotions – the British refusal to admit into Palestine Jews fleeing the Holocaust – demonstrated heartlessness rather than active brutality; Britain was not the original perpetrator of the evil, though its reaction was one of callous disregard for the victims. The spectacle of Jews fleeing the Nazis from Black Sea ports, risking their lives on ramshackle ships, only to be stopped from entering Palestine by the Royal Navy, has not lost its power over the years. The case of the *Struma*, which sank in the Black Sea with the loss of over 700 Jewish lives, was the worst. Of those who arrived in Palestine on board the *Patria*, some 300 lost their lives in a botched Haganah bombing; the British saw fit to intern the survivors in Mauritius.

The hostility of the British towards the Jews increased as they came to see Jewish immigration into Palestine as the destabilising element in a situation where, with war approaching, they urgently needed stability. From about 1944, Jewish attacks on British soldiers and officials not surprisingly caused British attitudes to harden further. Ultimately, the British were forced to acknowledge that their Mandate had ended in ignominious failure. It was the crucible in which the war of 1948 and what followed was forged.

Anthony Grenville

Letter to the Stars: Young Austrians visit survivors

Towards the end of the war, the Allies designated Austria as the first of Hitler's victims, rather than as a perpetrator at least equally responsible for the crimes committed by the Nazis. The Austrian government of the time and later governments were only too happy to accept this view, but in the last ten years the attitude has changed and now the government and most, if not all, of the people have recognised the guilt Austria shares with Germany. A very good example of this recognition is the work of a group called Letter to the Stars, which for the past four years has organised major events in the centre of Vienna involving thousands of schoolchildren. Pupils are also encouraged to research the stories of individual victims or survivors so that they should not be forgotten.

At the end of October, a group of

over 20 young Austrians came to London primarily to visit individual Shoah survivors and to hear their stories so that they could tell their schools about them. Most interviews were recorded for possible use by the Austrian media. The group also visited the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, listened to a talk by Bertha Leverton at the London Jewish Cultural Centre about the Kindertransport, participated in a Friday evening service and explanatory talk by Henry Kuttner at Belsize Square Synagogue, and attended a very friendly *Jause* at the Austrian Embassy together with many of the survivors they had met. It was very heartening and moving to meet these young people, who obviously were not themselves guilty of anything yet felt strongly the need to try and make amends for what their

grandparents' generation had done. In May next year, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Mauthausen, there will be a major rally in the Heldenplatz in Vienna sponsored by the government and the city. For more background, visit www.lettertothestars.at

George Vulkan

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AJR Journal
Dr Anthony Grenville Consultant Editor
Dr Howard Spier Executive Editor
Andrea Goodmaker Secretarial/Advertisements

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Danger! Enemy Alien!

By the beginning of 1940, English women began to join the Armed Forces, and vacancies arose in factories and offices. Consequently, the Home Office relaxed the stringent conditions of employment under which we were allowed to remain in England, and I got myself a job as an invoice typist with a firm of printers in Exeter.

I had moved into the home of a German woman, the widow of an Englishman, who let a few rooms and provided full board for £1 a week. My salary was 25/- a week, from which 1/6d was deducted for, I suppose, tax and national insurance. This left me with 3/6d net – not a great deal even in those days. To augment my income, I gave German lessons to a couple of doctors' wives two evenings a week. They had not experienced my domestic skills first-hand but knew of them by reputation and probably felt I couldn't possibly be a worse teacher than I had been a servant. They were right.

The firm I worked for was owned by a family of devout Baptists, who did all they could to befriend me. They asked me to tea at weekends, and a maiden aunt (every family had one then) sometimes drove me to the nearby seaside. But there was a small price to pay for their kindness. The poor people were bent on saving my soul and asked me to accompany them to chapel rather too often for my liking. Alas, my soul has always been stubbornly resistant to proselytisers of any persuasion, including ultra-orthodox Jews.

Just as I had contentedly settled in my job, in the spring of 1940, the authorities decided that I lived too close to the coast and, despite my employers' protestations, they conveyed me, together with a bunch of other dangerous female Jewish 'enemy aliens', to a Rowton House in Taunton, Somerset. Although my *Chambers*

Biographical Dictionary tells me that Montague William Lowry-Corry Rowton (1838-1903) 'devoted his time and money to the provision of decent cheap accommodation for working men', the institution we were sent to seemed more like a Dickensian workhouse – a refuge for the flotsam and jetsam of society. There were children and old people and confused people – all poor and apparently unwanted.

We were housed in a large dormitory and the food was appalling. Nevertheless, we had quite a good time there. A Quaker lady volunteered to organise walks and even arranged an excursion to Wells Cathedral. I used my unexpected leisure to adapt the shorthand I had learned at school for use in English.

Right at the start of the war we had been issued with gas masks, and the blackout regulations were rigidly enforced – much to the anguish of Rosie Bergmann (sister of Richard, the table-tennis wunderkind, world champion at 17), who suffered from claustrophobia – but any air-raid warnings at that time were promptly followed by the reassuring all-clear. (Over half a century later, by an extraordinary coincidence, a woman got talking to me at a bus stop in Willesden Lane, and it emerged not only that we were both native Austrians and had been in Taunton at the same time, but also that we had both worked in Munich for the US Army after the war. She was to call it our 'me too' conversation.)

Eventually, so everybody tells me – although I have no recollection of this whatsoever – I must have appeared before a tribunal. Be that as it may, all of us at Rowton House metamorphosed from 'enemy alien' to 'refugee from Nazi oppression' and were free to go anywhere we liked. Once again I headed for London, just in time for the Blitz.

Edith Argy

Club 43: Looking to the future with optimism

As part of our autumn programme, Club 43 welcomed Dr A. M. Schleich, Minister Counsellor, Head of Culture and Education at the German Embassy in London, who spoke to us about Anglo-German cultural and educational relations.

It was clear from Dr Schleich's talk that, like most Germans, she strongly favoured closer European co-operation and German integration in European activities. She regretted what she saw as Britain's reluctance to get closer to Europe.

While by no means denying the vital importance of Holocaust education, she said she placed greater emphasis on a vision of

future German participation in creating an atmosphere of European closeness and friendship.

This was a very successful and well-attended occasion. The German Embassy as always gives us considerable support and, with leading diplomatic functionaries like Dr Schleich, we can be confident of future generous help in our endeavours to preserve the cultural links of the former refugees with the lands of their birth and to further reconciliation with the present, innocent German generation after the horrors of the past.

Ernst Flesch

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A small cemetery in Bohemia

My grandparents lived in a small town in central Bohemia – Hostomice, some 35 km from Prague – where my grandfather had a small draper's shop. My grandmother died before I was born and my grandfather married again; my step-grandmother was always 'my grandmother' to me. My grandfather was a member and one-time head of the Jewish community, which included all the neighbouring villages. He was not particularly orthodox and was well respected in the wider community, playing chess with the local priest as one of his pastimes.

As a boy, I spent many of my vacations in Hostomice, roaming the countryside, swimming in the ponds, collecting mushrooms and blackberries. I remember being weighed on arrival on the scales in the hardware shop next to my grandfather's and again before departure when, to my grandmother's consternation, she found out that I had put on 10 dkg in spite of being more than well fed for over a month.

At that time, I didn't take particular notice of the small Jewish cemetery outside Hostomice, which was used by families scattered throughout a fairly wide region. My first real memory of the cemetery, where my great-grandparents and my grandmother were buried, was when my grandfather died in 1934, when I was 16. I remember well the funeral procession winding its way out of Hostomice and through country lanes and meadows on to the small hill with the cemetery. Little did I realise then that this would be one of the last – if not *the* last – funeral in the cemetery dating back to the late seventeenth century.

In April 1939 I managed to make my way to England; my parents, my sister and her family and many other relatives who stayed behind perished in the Holocaust. Among the very few survivors was my grandmother from Hostomice, who survived in Theresienstadt and in 1945 came to live with me almost until her death at the age of 95 in 1961. I returned to Prague in June 1945 (on board the first Lancaster bomber to land in Czechoslovakia after the war) and lived there with my family until 1968. During that period I visited the cemetery several times. It was neglected, overgrown, some stones were not upright – but on



Professor Pavel Novak

The cemetery is being regularly monitored by staff from the administration of the Prague Jewish community.

It has been declared a protected monument and is now a site for peaceful contemplation. Thus, the story of the cemetery has perhaps not a happy, but a satisfactory, ending.

the whole it was not devastated. When my uncle and aunt from the USA visited us in 1964, a friend of mine (not Jewish) helped to clear the paths to 'our' graves.

Ten days after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, my family and I left and within a short time made our way to England again – for my wife and me our second emigration. We settled in Newcastle upon Tyne, where we have lived since, and naturally didn't travel to Czechoslovakia for 22 years.

After 1990 we returned to Prague on a visit and have had a holiday in what is now the Czech Republic every year since.

Naturally we went to Hostomice as soon as possible. I was appalled by the devastation I found at the cemetery. Not only had the surrounding walls and the small prayer house practically vanished and the whole was completely overgrown, but many of the gravestones had been vandalised, toppled over, broken, any metal lettering gone. Nomi-

nally, the cemetery was now the property, and under the administration, of the Prague Jewish community, which had many calls on its attention and funds. Gradually, with the help of volunteers, some of the undergrowth was cleared, but a more fundamental approach was required. In 1994-95 I managed, with the help of surviving relatives, to raise funds which, when matched by funds from Prague, were sufficient to restore the damaged gravestones and clear the site. There was no point in trying to rebuild the walls or restore the prayer house – the cemetery is not in use and funds were not available. Furthermore, the cemetery is now surrounded by mature trees to make it invisible from the road – you can find it only if you know where to look.

A local couple (not Jewish), Marie and Bohuslav, who have lived nearby since childhood (Marie actually remembered my youngest aunt) took up the task of maintaining the restored cemetery by, among other things, clearing the paths. When they grew too old to continue, a younger relative took over.

On one of my visits, Marie told me she had helped to establish a small museum in a room of the former school – now the local council – in a nearby village. Marie, who is looking after the museum, showed me the exhibits. I found local memorabilia, crafts, a document signed by President Masaryk – and in a corner among others a page from a book about the history of Jews in Bohemia dealing with Hostomice and featuring my grandfather's photograph. At Marie's request, I supplied more family photographs, copies of documents, data on my family tree and suchlike. On my next visit to the museum, I saw a whole display, arranged by Marie, under the title 'The Story of One Jewish Family in our Region'.

Marie and Bohuslav have become good friends. I wouldn't dream now of visiting the cemetery without meeting them – and enjoying their hospitality.

The cemetery is being regularly monitored by staff from the administration of the Prague Jewish community. It has been declared a protected monument and is now a site for peaceful contemplation. Thus, the story of the cemetery has perhaps not a happy, but a satisfactory, ending.

Pavel Novak

Bending the rules

The unsung hero Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld

by Rubin Katz

Reading the review by Andrew Levy of Chanan Tomlin's book on Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld (September) brought back many memories. I was on Rabbi Schonfeld's first postwar transport from Poland. To corroborate what Andrew Levy had to say about this formidable rabbi's disregard for the 'rules of the game', may I bring up a typical example?

I came from a small town in Poland with a long, unpronounceable name. It was March 1946 when word reached us that a 'nice English rabbi' was on a rescue mission to Poland to take orphans out of the country. His car was actually fired on in the nearby Kielce area so he was forced to cut his journey short and return to Warsaw. As it was too dangerous for him to travel to the provinces, where some of the children were to be found, word spread that interested children should proceed to Warsaw without delay.

On arriving at the community centre there, I was met by an imposing, tall gentleman with piercing blue eyes and a red Van Dyke beard. The rabbi looked resplendent in British army uniform, with a badge of the Tablets of the Law on his officer's cap. Although he wasn't in the army, he had no doubt donned the uniform to protect him from the Poles. He spoke no Polish and I spoke no English, but we managed to communicate in a mixture of German and Yiddish. Regrettably, he informed me, the transport was full to capacity. I explained that I didn't want to go to England: we'd been pushed around long enough and I only wanted to go to Palestine, to join my two older brothers already there, to fight as soon as I was old enough to hold a gun. I was 14.

The rabbi promised to help me, but said I must first agree to go with him to England, from where I would have a better chance of getting to Palestine, which was controlled by the British. He said this, it transpired, to lure me away from Poland, where my life was in danger. There had been a pogrom in my small town, when five survivors out of the pitiful remnant had been brutally murdered, as well as in many other places. He told me there might be a way for me to join the transport after all as one of the boys on the list was backing



Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld

down, refusing to be separated from his ailing mother. I could take his place but I would have to take on his identity too, and I might not be able to revert to my real name for some time to come.

I let the good rabbi persuade me and I assured him he could count on me – I had all the right credentials, having survived the war by passing for a Christian boy, with an assumed name and a fake baptismal certificate. This would present no problem for me: it would mean just another alias, and this time without the wartime danger, I thought. As this was in the days of identity cards and having to report regularly to the police, it was no trivial matter. Technically, I might have entered the country illegally and I risked being sent back to where I came from.

Adolf Bader, the boy whose identity I adopted, was sponsored by a family named Swimer in London and, had I not taken his place, it would have been a wasted opportunity. The admirable rabbi didn't always adhere to convention and it was characteristic of the man not to miss an opportunity to rescue another child or to save a child who might otherwise have been lost to Judaism. We were all supposed to be below the age of 15, but there was even a pregnant young woman among us!

We were settled in the Nozyk Synagogue, the only house of worship left standing in Warsaw as it had been used as stables by the Germans. From Warsaw we flew in a Russian bomber to Danzig, sitting on the floor, packed tightly in the empty fuselage, and then

we went by truck to Gdynia on the Baltic coast, where a Swedish ship was waiting for us. How Rabbi Schonfeld managed to arrange all this, at a time when Europe was still in turmoil, escapes me.

It was a Friday night when we walked up the gangplank and boarded the freighter *Ragne* at Gdynia. We were all excited at the prospect of turning our back on that unhappy country. Soon after embarkation, Rabbi Schonfeld assembled all the *Kinder* in the dining hall to welcome us on board and deliver a few words in honour of the Shabbat bride. He picked out two of the older girls and invited them to light the candles. It was a touching scene that none of us had experienced since our mothers had performed it in our own homes so very long ago. Some of the younger children couldn't even remember it, having recently emerged from convents, so the significance was entirely lost on them. That night the *Ragne* weighed anchor and, with a blast of the foghorn, pulled away from the shore, where we were clearly not wanted, heading for our adoptive country, with our very own Scarlet Pimpernel on board in the guise of a rabbi.

The rabbi lost no time in introducing us to good English manners – how to say 'Thank you' and 'I beg your pardon' – and, being a great Anglophile, he tried to turn us into instant 'little Englanders' by teaching us 'Rule Britannia', 'God Save the King' and so on. None of us understood the significance behind the stirring words that the rabbi wrote phonetically on a blackboard and we repeated them parrot-fashion. He was the only one on board to look after some 125 adolescents angry with the world, in particular the boys. There was even a plot brewing to force the crew to change course and head for Palestine! Only the rabbi would command our respect, both during and after the voyage. We worshipped him. Some of the older girls were only too happy to assist him in taking care of the very young, some of whom were sick and needed attention. During the nine-day voyage many of the teenage girls fell head-over-heels for the handsome rabbi.

On the morning of Sunday 29 March

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor reserves the right
to shorten correspondence
submitted for publication

RECOLLECTIONS OF INTERNMENT

Sir – In June 1939 my two sisters and I, the eldest, were rescued via the Kindertransport. At first, a marvellous English lady took us into her humble home but, after her death seven months later, my sisters went to foster-parents. I, just over 16, was employed in domestic service. Our father had managed to escape, but as he was already in his early sixties and heartbroken he couldn't look after his beloved daughters. Apart from that, his wife, the mother of his three children, was left behind in Prague. A dire situation for a once successful father and provider who had already endured the trauma of uprooting his family from Berlin.

I was the only one at the time who managed to see my dad occasionally in his furnished room in Tufnell Park, London. One day, his spiteful landlady nearly shut the door in my face, saying: 'Your father is gone. The police have taken him.' What a shock! However, rumours about internment had already circulated via the refugee network. I gathered myself together. My next thoughts were: 'It can't possibly be the same as being taken by the Gestapo.' Just the same, I was in a quandary.

What a relief when I heard from my dad at House 7: O: Camp, Douglas, Isle of Man, saying I shouldn't worry – he was fine. I sent him titbits from my ten-shillings-a-week earnings. He was touched but said there was no need. A few months later he was released. Yet he spoke of his time in internment with affection, almost longing. A gregarious man, he was in the company of fellow refugees. He joined in all the interesting cultural activities. Apart from that, he was a great sportsman and the self-defence sport of jujitsu was his hobby. To the amazement of his fellow internees, the elderly man showed off his sporting skills to them. Most of them were much younger. He made friends there. He dreaded returning to his lonely life.

My father died in July 1946, in utter despair, aged 67. But his time as an internee was one of the few positive experiences of the later period of his sad and lonely life. Also, he was not forgotten. When those who knew him there heard my name, they exclaimed: 'Are you the daughter of Karl Gumpel?' Yes, I said with sorrow and pride. 'He was a real character. We shall always remember him. He cheered us up. And the jujitsu!'

Laura Selo (née Gumpel),
London NW11

Sir – I well remember appearing at an internment tribunal in Cambridge before a

magistrate and two assessors who questioned me to decide my status as an alien – or, better, enemy alien. I was 'awarded' a black label to be attached to the back of my Aliens Registration Certificate (Category C) and reimbursed the two shillings and six pence I had spent to attend the hearing.

Little did they realise that a few days later I would spend a week as a member of the Air Training Corps flying in Blenheim bombers and Havoc nightfighters at the Operational Training Unit at Cranfield airfield. That was the beginning of a long story which culminated in flying at low level in a B-17G (Flying Fortress) over the house in Cologne I had left as a refugee child six years before. The wheel had turned full circle.

Ernest G. Kolman,
Greenford, Middx

Sir – During my 11 months' internment on the Isle of Man I encountered a non-Jewish German prisoner who told me he kept up correspondence with his next of kin. Each letter was headed 'Prisoner of War Mail' and forwarded by the Red Cross. I sent a letter to my grandfather in Thüringen by the same method and had one answer back from Theresienstadt. The rest was silence. A few years ago I heard from Yad Vashem that he was listed in the Terezin Memorial Book, having been sent there on 20 September 1942, and that he died in the Terezin ghetto on 3 August 1944. Nazi bookkeeping!

Anthony Goldsmith
Wembley, Middx

BRINGING BACK MEMORIES

Sir – I enjoy the style, erudition and range of topics of Anthony Grenville's articles. They frequently recall some long-forgotten event or person. The following anecdote – almost certainly apocryphal – is a case in point. A friend encountered Julius Fromm (see November issue) on a Sunday stroll, leading a large group of small children. When asked who they were, Fromm replied curtly: 'Reklamationen' (advertisements).

Dr Grenville's versions of German phrases are always very good and none better than the one that provoked the thought of Emil Jannings croaking 'cock-a-doodle-doo' in *The Blue Angel*.

Guy Bishop
Newtown, Connecticut, USA

KRISTALLNACHT COMMEMORATION

Sir – Though a hospital appointment prevented me from attending, I am delighted there was a Kristallnacht commemoration service at the AJR Centre

last month. Not so many years ago, this night of terror was commemorated in prestigious venues throughout the country and special prayers were said in most synagogues for the victims. For me, that night has special significance for it was the last time I saw my father.

I am surprised and disappointed that so many British-born Jews know nothing about it. In the vibrant community, one of the largest outside London, of which I have been a member for over 30 years, very few have knowledge of what happened that night in 1938. In order that this gruesome event should not be forgotten, I have sponsored our weekly synagogue leaflet in commemoration. It would be interesting to know if other communities remember that day. Yes, we have National Holocaust Day and Yom HaShoah as well as Memorial Prayer during Yizkor, but a special Kaddish should be said for a special day.

Otto Deutsch
Southend-on-Sea

WHAT IS A JEW?

Sir – I should like to point out a mistake in the Point of View article by Harold Saunders (November). He states that the criteria for being Jewish are based on being born of a Jewish maternal line. Liberal Judaism (to which I proudly belong) accepts the children of Jewish males, as long as they have been brought up in the Jewish way of life. I say this with no bias. Both my parents were born Jews. Furthermore, Mr Saunders implies that Judaism is purely a religion. I disagree. Judaism is also a race. Compare, if you will, the difference between being of the Muslim race and following the Islamic religion. We have one word where they have two. Religiously, there are many forms of Judaism. Racially, there is just one. I belong to exactly the same race as Mr Saunders but, evidently, not exactly to the same religion.

Peter Phillips
peterphillips@supanet.com

Sir – Having considered myself a non-practising Jew, I was very interested in the *Independent's* obituary of Rabbi Sherwin Wine, the founder of Humanistic Judaism. Having been a Reform rabbi for some years, he lost his belief in a personal god and thought what was needed was a new kind of Judaism for those who could not believe in a personal god. He founded the Society for Humanistic Judaism, which has grown and formed communities mainly in America, but also in Israel and Europe. He explained his beliefs in his book *Judaism beyond God* in 1985, a book which is out of print but obtainable from public libraries.

P. E. Roland
Leamington Spa

COMING TO TERMS

Sir – While reviewing *The Single Light* for last month's issue of the Journal, I was struck by the insight of an SS guard who realised that he was participating in a criminal act. A lot has been written about

how Jews came to terms with their experiences after the war. Has there been research into the post-war adjustment of the SS? How did they convert from murder to becoming teachers, insurance agents, civil servants? How did they rationalise their Nazi past? I would be glad if anyone has information on the subject.

Martha Blend
London N10

GO TO BLETCHLEY

Sir - I urge those who have not visited Bletchley Park to go forthwith. There are several reasons:

1. This top-secret government establishment was instrumental in breaking Nazi and Japanese codes via the Colossus and Enigma machines developed there by Alan Turing and others.
2. Without its help, Britain might not have won the war, or the war may have dragged on.
3. One of the guides who take visitors round Bletchley is Ruth Bourne, who worked there during the war. She spoke to our Southgate group earlier this year and gave a memorable presentation of her war work. She is a remarkable lady, highly knowledgeable and fluent, and thus much sought after.
4. Had not the war been won by the Allies, few Jews would have remained in these islands.

Eric Adler
London N20

ISRAELIS AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Sir - According to your November issue (Newsround), 37 per cent of Israelis believe the use of nuclear weapons to prevent a war would be justified, while 35 per cent believe the weapons could be justifiably used during a war. Have these Israelis taken leave of their senses? Have they never seen pictures of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Israeli possession of nuclear weapons, and the continued harassment of Vanunu for telling the world of it, is probably a motive for other countries in the region to wish to acquire them - to deter Israel. If ever a nuclear weapon is detonated in the Middle East, the carnage would spread far beyond any intended target. Can't these 35-37 per cent think?

Irene Gill
Oxford

WHO'S COUNTING?

Sir - When Victor Ross attempted to find a common denominator to count Jews (October), it struck a chord. The AJR should sponsor a competition for the best means of apportioning Jewishness - which could include a quantum as well as an uncertainty principle and, maybe, a bit of special relativity. In the Theresienstadt ghetto, I mixed with the Czech crowd and, whereas some of the older inmates suffered from the delusion that they were Czechs first and Jews second - a *Weltanschauung* thoroughly knocked out of Jews from Germany by then - we young ones claimed to be 200

per cent Jews, that is we were both Jews and Zionists. Did that count as two for each of us, like BOGOF at Tesco? Nearly all of the surviving *Mischlinge* I know, i.e. Jews only by German definition, went to Israel and served there in the army and air force. Did that cause a quantum leap from associate to full membership, or did Aryan mothers and the absence of a *mohel* after birth result in a hybrid yet to be defined to fit a Grand Unified Theory?

Frank Bright
Ipswich

KINDERTRANSPORTS CLEARLY DOCUMENTED

Sir - Susanne Dyke feels (October) that 'the adults who made these transports possible were not researched and written up properly.' She will be pleased to learn (probably with thousands of others) that the events leading up to the creation and funding of the Kindertransports are clearly documented in Amy Zahl Gottlieb's book *Men of Vision: Anglo-Jewry's Aid to Victims of the Nazi Regime, 1933-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998). It lists all the political issues of the era and the contributions made in money and succour by institutions, individuals and families. And much more! This book made so much sense to me as an adult - explaining those factors which had been a mystery to me as a child saved by the KT.

Vernon Saunders
Weybridge, Surrey

THE YOUNGEST KINDERTRANSPORT REFUGEE?

Sir - I arrived at Liverpool Street Station on 3 April 1939 at the age of three. I'm now 71. Does that make me the youngest 'refugee' on the Kindertransport?

Congratulations on the monthly AJR magazine - always a good read, even if you don't always agree with the writers/contributors.

Erika Klausne
Wembley, Middx

'EXCELLENT NEWSLETTERS'

Sir - Your article 'A legacy for posterity' (October) is an excellent example of why the AJR continues to inform and enlighten the Jewish community. You ask searching questions about the Jewish future and the leadership which I find, sadly, missing from so many of the Jewish 'debates' among the *machers*. Keep up the good work, continue to publish an admirably researched journal, and inform Victor Ross that his current article, 'Too few Jews', brought a smile - a big smile - to many readers.

Professor Eric Moonman
London N7

Sir - Just to let you know that last month's *Journal* seemed to surpass itself. I found so much of interest in it, especially the article 'Between you and I'. At long last, somebody feels the same way as I do. I could scream every time anyone says that. I call it semi-educated English, spoken by

people who think they're educated but obviously are not. I don't mind in the least when people say 'me' instead of 'I', e.g. 'Me and my girlfriend' or 'It's me.' But to hear these pronouns wrongly applied the other way round makes me hopping mad, as does 'who' in the accusative or dative case. After all, people don't say 'That's for he', do they?

(Mrs)Margarete Stern
London NW3

Sir - Thank you very much for sending me your newsletters, which are excellent.

Ms J. McLeod
Sheffield

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ART NOTES

Gloria Tessler

As a boy of six, **Georg Baselitz** saw the bombing of Dresden, which was a pivotal influence on his artistic development. Born in Saxony in 1938, he became a painter, printmaker and sculptor – but he was expelled from the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in East Berlin in 1956 for ‘social-political immaturity’. Those who sought to close his mind succeeded in opening it to Kandinsky, Nietzsche, Samuel Beckett and Baudelaire,



Mit Roter Fahne (With a Red Flag), 1965. Private Collection, Germany. Photo: Frank Oleski. © Georg Baselitz

but also to Russian Symbolists, totemic African sculpture, French and Italian Mannerists, and even the art of the mentally ill.

Now, the **Royal Academy (RA)**, sponsored by Eurohypo, has launched a breathtaking retrospective of his work. Few artists so bitterly reflect German history over the past 60 years as Baselitz. The upside-down paintings, which developed from his *Fractured* era, his bleeding trees, his extended heads peering down at odd angles – these are themes to which he repeatedly returns to try and make sense of his broken homeland.

In the recurring *Big Night Down the Drain*, neutralised Nazi officers appear carved in almost blind fury; the African muscularity of his shapes, the dislocated limbs all speak of the butchery of war and the helplessness of religion. Baselitz uses abstraction to turn the nineteenth-century German folk tale on its head. In the terrifying imagery of forestry legend, the hunter becomes the hunted, the woodsman turns executioner, and *human* trees are cut in half. The work is brutish and painful, but immensely powerful.

Baselitz's recent work recalls Dresden and its women on scratched wooden panels which reveal the material beneath the tempera. The wood, like the forests, is a symbol of Germany. In the 1980s he returns to the theme of Dresden: these so-called *Zeitgeist* paintings include the *Last Supper in Dresden*, and the 1990s see his *Remix* paintings, in which he revisits the themes of his earlier work, to his African totemism, his upside-down figures.

The RA takes an arguably less challenging view of art in **Making History: Antiquaries in Britain 1707-2007**, celebrating the role of the Society of Antiquaries, which helped develop a more scientific approach to history from the pagan or Christian belief systems which prevailed before the seventeenth century. An enthusiastic David Starkey opened the exhibition, which featured a Yorkist processional cross from the battlefield of Bosworth in 1485, the inventory of Henry VIII's possessions, and an early copy of Magna Carta. Outstandingly preserved are the early oil-on-oak panels of the English kings, notably Richard III toying with a ring, and a forbidding painting of Mary Tudor.

Pop Art Portraits at the **National Portrait Gallery** analyses the genre's commercial roots. From **Warhol's Marilyn Monroe** to **Roy Lichtenstein's** glamour illustrations, from **Jasper Johns** to **David Hockney**, we see a Britain slowed down by wartime austerity, looking to a less traumatised America for inspiration. Pop art was a way out of abstract expressionism and, by the 60s, the new celebrity culture gave us all the icons of the day. Its influence continues to be felt in the twenty-first century.

REVIEWS

THEATRE

Theatre of despair

THE INVESTIGATION

by Peter Weiss

conceived and directed by
Dorcy Rugamba and Isabelle Gyselinx
Young Vic, London

LOTTE'S JOURNEY

by Candida Cave

directed by Ninon Jerome
New End Theatre, London

Does the Holocaust exist out of its time, like a rogue gene within mankind? Is it really rooted in mid-twentieth-century Nazi Germany or could it happen anywhere – a random nightmare made flesh? In this adaptation of Peter Weiss's intense and challenging docu-drama *The Investigation*, a team of Rwandan artists, speaking in French with English surtitles, re-incarnate Auschwitz and the Nuremberg trials, while the roles of judge, victim and executioner flow seamlessly between them. It is a skeletal, truly pared-down production, in which the actors, dressed in white perhaps to suggest innocence, appear from all parts of the theatre in a slow and nonchalant manner that does nothing to convey the horrific events they are about to portray.

They proceed to deliver a catalogue of horrors that took place in the concentration camps – men forced to jump over sticks before going to the gas chambers, a boy with an apple in his hand whose head is dashed against the wall, mothers and their babies sent to their deaths, beatings and shootings that leave victims dead or dying. It is not difficult to see why this Rwandan production chooses the Nazi Holocaust to make the case that holocausts continue and are a part of society. The programme says: 'In revisiting the Nazi war crimes trial, it is our own time in history that we examine. Such a crime should never have been possible again. Nothing comparable should have emerged and developed in the world after the Shoah.'

But tragically it did – in 1994, when Rwanda became the killing fields for millions of Tutsis and Hutus. And so, informed with their own Holocaust, they have delivered a theatre of anger and despair, without human names, only numbers and events of unspeakable cruelty. We are not asked to identify with the victims, only to acknowledge them. Is there a point to such a play? The answer is inconclusive. As the guilty

remain in denial of their crimes pleading the injunction to obey orders, one of the actors finally asserts that 'the society that produced the camps is our society'. In other words, there is a hidden drama going on between guards and prisoners, between perpetrators and victims – and that drama is the collusion of fear.

Lotte's Journey gives us what *The Investigation* cannot: the true story of a single Holocaust victim. The young German-Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon painted her life in a feverish autobiography of 1,300 gouaches entitled *Life? Or Theatre?*, a vivid narrative which survived her death at 26 at the hands of the Nazis in 1943. Her work was admired by Marc Chagall and was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1999 to considerable acclaim.

The paintings express her anguish at learning that the women in her family were all suicidal. Her mother, Franziska, grief-stricken at the suicide of her 18-year-old sister, throws herself out of a fourth-floor window. Her grandmother, who has lost two daughters, makes an attempt on her own life in September 1939 after Kristallnacht. Charlotte grows up believing her mother died of pneumonia and is told the truth at the age of 13 by her grandfather, who cruelly describes the depressive illness which has devastated her matrilineal line.

And now Charlotte and her successful family – her father a famous surgeon, her stepmother an opera diva – must confront their own Jewishness as Hitler turns Germany into a Nazi fortress.

In Candida Cave's new play, the family tragedy is recalled as Lotte and her husband find themselves with others on a transport to the East, enduring filthy conditions and near starvation. Haunted by the suicidal tendencies of the women in her family, Lotte faces an ultimate test of character as realisation dawns that Auschwitz-Birkenau is her destination. As the destructive threads of Charlotte's matriarchs begin to unravel, the Nazi presence hovers in the shadows of their dark narcissism. Perhaps Cave, like Weiss, is also making the point that genocide and self-destruction can be uneasy bedfellows.

Selina Chilton gives an incandescent performance as Charlotte, whose silent rage contrasts with Valerie Colgan's compelling performance as the whining and clumsy Franziska and the tragic grandmother. The same cannot be said for the male actors, who appear wooden and ill at ease in their roles.

The play gathers pace after a somewhat stilted first half and uses symbolism to good effect. For example Lotte's first love, Amadeus, sees her face in her drawing of birch trees – a haunting

touch since she would, of course, die in Birkenau, a place of birch trees. The ending cleverly evokes the family death-wish yet, despite its powerful subject-matter, the play somehow fails to move.

Gloria Tessler

SCREEN

The devil's work THE COUNTERFEITERS (DIE FÄLSCHER)

starring Karl Markovics, August Diehl, Devid Striesow
directed by Stefan Ruzowitzky
at selected cinemas

What price survival? This is the dilemma at the heart of Stefan Ruzowitzky's powerful film. Forced to choose between fortifying the Nazi war effort and imminent death, what should a multifaceted team of talented Jews decide to do? While these men were, for the most part, artists, forgers and printers, there were also one or two former banking executives, dismayed at their forced association with such 'lowlife'. And the key to survival? Forging millions of banknotes of various denominations for the benefit of the Reich.

Forger-in-chief Salamon Sorovitsch – his real-life counterpart was Salamon Smolianoff – is introduced enjoying not only his survival but also the riches he has managed to acquire before liberation at Monte Carlo's gaming tables and the luxurious Hotel de Paris. But 'Sally', movingly played by Karl Markovics, remains haunted. And his expressive face frequently betrays the seemingly cold-blooded demeanour he presents to his fellow prisoners. A Russian Jew based in Berlin and an accomplished artist, who decided before the war to engage in forgery as an easy way to make money, Sally owes his survival at Mauthausen to his skills at portraiture and is later taken to Sachsenhausen to lead the team of counterfeiters.

His antagonist is Adolf Burger, a younger man who has been transported from Auschwitz, where he lost his wife. Burger, in a compelling performance by August Diehl, is the 'conscience' of the team, who can barely be persuaded to carry out the 'devil's work'. Frequently he is on the point of inciting a rebellion that would put everyone's life at risk. The brutality of conditions outside the 'gilded cage' where the counterfeiters benefit from soft beds, adequate rations and washing facilities is tellingly conveyed.

Their jailor, SS officer Friedrich Herzog

The Jews of Vienna

The latest issue of the quarterly *Jewish Renaissance* includes a major feature on 'The Jews of Vienna'. For details of a special offer, contact the editor, Janet Levin, on 020 8876 1891.

(Devid Striesow), is very different from his fellows in the camp. Rather than the usual Nazi brute, he is shown as a pragmatist intent on getting the job done and not averse to turning a blind eye from time to time or to sully his 'purity' with the odd display of friendship for the useful *Untermenschen*. Indeed, part of the film's fascination is the complexity of the men's moral predicament and the relationships between themselves and with their captor.

A particularly touching feature is Sally's relationship with Kolya, a starving young Russian artist he meets on the train to Sachsenhausen. Sally's initial gesture in giving Kolya his own rations develops later into a protector/protégé relationship and it is in Sally's reactions to Kolya's fate that his essential humanity can be perceived.

Austrian director Ruzowitzky, who has read extensively about the Holocaust, has based his film of the counterfeiting Operation Bernhard on Burger's memoir, *The Devil's Workshop*. Ruzowitzky, whose grandparents were involved in the Nazi regime – his great-uncle was photographed escorting Hitler – took on the project as a form of expiation. 'It's my history too,' he has been quoted as saying.

Emma Klein

Fact and fiction

WINNIE AND WOLF: A NOVEL

by A. N. Wilson

Hutchinson, 2007, 361 pp.

The supposed narrator of this semi-fictional work is the secretary at the Wagner House in Bayreuth. The Winnie of the title is the Welsh-born wife of Siegfried Wagner, son of the composer Richard, and Wolf is the intimate name of Adolf Hitler. The ostensible core of the 'novel' is the relationship between these two, played out against the history of Germany between the World Wars, as seen through German eyes.

The known facts are that Winifred Williams was rescued from an orphanage in East Grinstead by a German musician named Klindworth, who was in the Wagner circle. She married Siegfried Wagner, son of the composer, and bore

Reviews continued on page 10

REVIEWS continued from page 9

him four children, one of whom, Wieland, became an innovator in the production of Wagner operas. She helped her husband run the Bayreuth Theatre in his lifetime and, after his death, became the sole director.

Wilson gives us a fascinating account of the rivalries between, and personal idiosyncracies of, conductors such as Furtwängler and Toscanini. The latter, to his credit, avoided Bayreuth after the Nazis came to power. Against this personal story are set events in the wider, political world.

Winifred met 'Wolf' when he had

'If you ignored the brutal imprisonment of trouble-makers, the bullying and harassment of Jews, you could persuade yourself that all was well in Germany.'

spent years in Vienna, disappointed in his artistic ambition. His love of opera and delight in romps with the Wagner children made 'Uncle Wolf' a popular visitor at Bayreuth. As for Hitler's political career, there were many dips in the Nazis' fortunes when their power might have been curtailed. Winnie helped to restore his spirits during these periods, especially after the tragic death of his niece Geli.

A most interesting aspect of the book is its portrayal of the attitudes of middle-class Germans. Aware of Nazi thuggery, they dismissed it as a passing phase. As the narrator puts it: 'If you ignored the brutal imprisonment of trouble-makers, the bullying and harassment of Jews, you could persuade yourself that all was well in Germany.'

As for Winnie and Wolf, they are supposed to have had a relationship which resulted in the birth of a daughter who was adopted by the narrator and his wife. She grows up to be a musician living with her adoptive parents in Communist East Germany. While on tour, she defects to the West and ends up in the United States having reclaimed the family name 'Hiedler', the married name of Hitler's mother.

Make what you will of that! Winnie herself was interrogated by the Allies after the war for her allegiance to the Nazis, but was spared long imprisonment through the testimony of musicians she had rescued from concentration camps.

This intriguing book includes interesting comments on the Wagner operas and the background to the performances in Bayreuth as well as

insights into the German mentality in the 1920s-30s.

Martha Blend

Autobiography or novel?

**TILL FIRST MORNING LIGHT:
TALES OF HUNGARIAN JEWRY**
by Yaakov Barzilai

London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007,
136pp., £14.50 paper

My heart sank when I saw on the front cover that this book belonged to the publishers' Library of Holocaust Testimonies. One wonders whether there is any need for yet more testimonies running to more than 100 pages. My heart sank even lower when I looked at the back cover: 'This is an autobiographical novel.' Which was it: autobiography or novel? A contradiction in terms.

Yaakov Barzilai is a well-known poet of Hungarian origin living in Israel. His book amply demonstrates his leaning towards poetry. He grew up in Debrecen, a large city with a sizeable Jewish minority. Despite limited opportunities, most of the city's Jews prospered and led a more or less harmonious life among their Christian neighbours.

The book begins with the hero observing the world from his mother's belly, listening to everything but not seeing. This chapter sets the tone for the poetic side, which alternates with a description of the horrors experienced by the hero's family and friends.

The idyllic life is shattered by the Germans' march into town. We are given a graphic description of the explosion of hatred on the part of even the most trusted and long-serving employees of the author's father. One such employee, entrusted with the family's valuables, promptly starts wearing the jewellery and returns nothing after the liberation.

The author's bitterness at his family's fate is expressed in, for example, a sarcastic description of the terrible journey to the 'Bergen-Belsen holiday camp' as well as the image of 'religious Jews sending faxes to heaven'.

Eventually liberation comes as the American tanks overtake their train from Belsen. The book ends movingly albeit in an unrealistic fashion.

Re the translation: Arrow Cross and not Crossbow is the correct translation of the name of the Hungarian fascists; and the name Robbie should be spelled Robi.

To conclude, the mixing of fact with fiction devalues the book as a testimony, but the poetic style causes it to stand out among similar works.

Janos Fisher



LETTER
FROM
ISRAEL



Oasis of serenity

Israelis like spending Saturdays in the open air. The working week begins on Sunday and Friday tends to be a day for running errands, so that the weekend is all too brief. Thus Saturday is the only day many families can spend time together, as is evinced by the clogged state of the roads. Of course, those who consider Shabbat a day on which to pray and rest are not part of this equation, but they are a minority.

So on Saturdays the beaches are crowded and parks are full. Those shopping areas and markets which remain open are thronged with families out shopping, eating in crowded restaurants or hunting for bargains. Picnic areas abound with barbecues, or *mangals*; these are traditionally men's work, though I confess that the sight of bare-chested males sweating over hot coals does not arouse my appetite.

There are, however, one or two oases of serenity where one can spend a Saturday outside without being subjected to the cut-and-thrust of life *en masse*. Deep in the heartland of Israel, in the area known as the Elah Valley, close to open fields and the JNF's Britain Forest, there is an old Turkish building which was once a *khan* or way-station for travellers.

The building houses a musical family. The mother, Kochava Taragan, an accomplished flautist, arranges chamber concerts which are held on the terrace or in the large living room every Saturday at noon. Before the concert everyone is treated to a bowl of nourishing soup with home-made croutons. The chamber ensembles, often including Kochava herself, play a selection of pieces for an hour or two, often interspersed by some words of explanation. Sometimes the birds outside add their own contribution to the music. Afterwards most of the audience repairs to one of the local restaurants for lunch, though if you haven't booked a table in advance you might find yourself obliged to go home.

Dorothea Shefer-Vanson

Samurai warriors and suicide bombers

Peter Fraenkel, BBC World Service Controller for Eastern European Services (retired), delivered at the end of October the 2007 Professor Bill Epstein Memorial Lecture entitled 'The German-Jewish Consul and the Samurai'. The lecture, given in memory of my husband at the University of Sussex, was sponsored by the University's Centre for German-Jewish Studies.

Peter Fraenkel discussed the ideologically motivated murder in August 1874 of Ludwig Haber, a 32-year-old German-Jewish trader and acting German consul in the Japanese port of Hakodate. Our twenty-first century is familiar with suicide bombers; the nineteenth and the earlier twentieth centuries were not. But even in the nineteenth century there was in Japan a series of assassinations by killers determined to die along with their victims. Haber's murderer, Hidechika Tazaki, 23, a Samurai from Akita on the main island of Japan, was steeped in Shinto texts and prepared to give his life in order to rid Japan of foreigners.

The economic and political background of this event is that Japan had remained



Ludwig Haber

virtually isolated until the 1850s, when American ships with superior weaponry forced her to sign treaties opening the country to foreign trade. This humiliation lingered on and may even have helped to motivate the admiral who led the Pearl Harbor attack. It certainly caused tensions between Japanese factions. In 1868 a group of Samurai used these tensions to dislodge

the *shogun* in a palace coup. They succeeded in the Meiji Restoration, bringing back to power the long sidelined emperor. A state Shinto religion was then used to deify the emperor, to counter the spread of Christianity, and to fuel agitation against Buddhism.

The Samurai assassin had never met his victim, the German-Jewish, liberal-minded trader-consul. But he was determined to kill at least one foreigner. He followed Haber out walking and hacked him to pieces with a sword. He then gave himself up to the police, knowing he would be condemned to death. He explained that he had been ordered in a dream to get rid of these heinous foreigners so as to pacify the mind of the Founder God and let the light of Japan shine throughout the world. He was executed six weeks later. Can an analogy be drawn between what motivated the Samurai and what motivates present-day suicide bombers?

A fuller account of this nineteenth-century *cause célèbre* is available on www.ludwighaber.blogspot.com

T. Scarlett Epstein

BENDING THE RULES *continued from page 5*

1946 our boat tied up next to Tower Bridge and we were taken in coaches to a mansion in Woodberry Down, near Manor House. This large building had been fitted out to accommodate all of us, with nurses in crisp white uniforms lined up outside waiting to take care of us. Some of the children spent weeks there until foster homes could be arranged for them, to make room for future transports. I fondly recall that on Rabbi Schonfeld's visits to the hostel he would often greet his *Kinder* with 'Have you had your *Taschengeld* this week?' and produce a half-crown out of his pocket.

I have been wanting to say this for a long time: during my time at the Woodberry Down hostel, the Anglo-Jewish community at large showed little interest in us. I waited patiently for an invitation to experience again a Shabbat dinner in a family environment, but it

never came. Furthermore, when we got older, as 'aliens' we were not considered suitable escorts for their daughters either.

In due course, I managed to locate an uncle, who had come here from Halberstadt, and I went to stay with him in Leeds. Some readers may wonder how I fared as a schoolboy in Yorkshire with a name like Adolf so soon after the war. Well, I was often greeted with two fingers of the one hand pressed against the upper lip and with the other hand raised in a Hitler salute. But all this was more than offset by the illustrious surname Bader. The name was then on everyone's lips and a mere hint of 'Uncle Douglas' was sufficient to make the boys turn green with envy – and baffle them at the same time: how come, unlike my 'uncle', I had an accent!

I saw Rabbi Schonfeld for the last

time in 1982 at a gathering to celebrate his seventieth birthday at Raleigh Close Synagogue in London. He was already frail, having suffered a stroke. This largely unsung hero, who rescued thousands, died two years later, at the age of 72. Those who had the privilege of knowing this larger-than life figure, in particular those he saved and helped, will cherish his memory with deep affection. As far as his detractors at the time are concerned, all I can say is that compared with him they were pygmies – while they debated and *kvetched* he acted!

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CONTEMPORARY PAINTING
AND SCULPTURE

INSIDE the AJR

New group formed: Radlett, Bushey and Elstree

We got off to an excellent start, expertly handled by Esther Rinkoff and Hazel Beiny. Having all introduced ourselves, we recalled how we arrived in this country and the first few years of our lives here. We were evenly divided between former Berliners and former Viennese. *Eric Newman*

Next meeting: 12 Dec. Chanukah Party

Bertha Leverton in Cardiff

Our special guest, Bertha Leverton, explained how and why she had become so interested in the Kindertransport. She left home in Munich at the age of 16 and had the joy of seeing her parents again later, in contrast with so many others whose parents never made it. *Charles Meyer*

Newcastle speaker's impressions of Poland

Henry Ross JP gave his personal impressions of a recent visit to Poland. He said the country was rapidly changing and becoming actively involved in the EU and NATO. Due to the general focus on Auschwitz, he reflected, it was sometimes not fully appreciated that there were five other major extermination sites in Poland.

Walter Knoblauch

Next meeting: 12 Dec. Chanukah Party and Quiz

Hendon discussion on intermarriage

Following our Succot party, Rabbi Stephen Katz initiated an extremely interesting discussion on intermarriage, a problem caused in part by the difficulty of finding Jewish partners. *Annette Saville*

Next meeting: 11 Dec. Chanukah Party

Edinburgh: Visit to Berlin

Dorothea Bandler described her visit to Berlin as a guest of the city of 'families originally from Germany'. She drew attention to the city's revival, the flowering of Jewish life, the culture, the greenness, the German thoroughness, the attitude of making amends, and the lavish hospitality. The visit included experiences that deeply affected all members of the group. *Jonathan Kish*

Edgware and Pinner outing

We had a fascinating outing to the relatively unknown Foundling Museum in Bloomsbury. The Museum houses the remains of the 'hospital' set up in the eighteenth century by Sea Captain Thomas Coram, who was appalled at seeing so many abandoned babies on the streets of London. *Eve Glicksman*

Essex talk by former mayor

Dr Alan Crystal, former mayor of Southend,

spoke about his family background and his duties as a liberal councillor on the planning and licensing committees. Southend has had quite a few Jewish mayors compared with the population at large. *Larry Lisner*

Next meeting: 11 Dec. Chanukah Party

Oxford ABC

A good number of members attended Jussi Brainin's talk on the ups and downs of his eventful life which he entitled 'My A (For Austria), B (For Britain) and C (For Canada) Trilogy'. *Jussi Brainin*

Next meeting: 11 Dec. Chanukah Party and Quiz

Ilford: The Nuremberg Trials

Leslie Sutton spoke about the strict security and the process of selecting translators for these unique trials, which he personally attended. We learned a lot about this most famous event. *Meta Roseneil*

Next meeting: 5 Dec. Chanukah Party and Quiz

Glasgow: Yet another story of survival solved

Michael Tobias of www.jewishgen.org solved yet another story of survival and family reunion, that of Moniek Garber, Glasgow, and Moshe Porat-Perelman, Kvar Saba, Israel - cousins, childhood friends and descendents of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhyn, Belarus. Both served as soldiers during the war, their cruel 'adventures' taking them in many directions in Europe, Asia, Africa and Canada, finally bringing them together again in Paris. *Jonathan Kish*

Surrey get-together

Some 15 of us met in the congenial surroundings of the Chertsey home of Janet Clark and Anthony Portner to enjoy coffee and cakes and to exchange views and experiences of the past. *Alfred Kessler*

Next meeting: 6 Dec. At home of Edmée Barta

Pinner: What is art?

Around 50 of us listened to Alan Cohen explore the characteristics an artist must possess: imagination, creativity, originality, communication skills, understanding of form. All boiled down, he said, to 'Do you like it?' Much to think about and talk about, which we did over tea. *Paul Samet*

Next meeting: 6 Dec. Chanukah Party

Brighton & Hove Sarid: Kitchener Camp

Prof Claire Ungerson spoke about the establishment of Kitchener Camp, run by the brothers Jonas and Phinneas May. When the Pioneer Corps was formed at the outbreak of WWII, those who joined it were sent to France, while the remaining few Dover Court Boys were interned on the Isle of Man. *Ceska Abrahams*

Next meeting: 10 Dec. Chanukah Party

Cleve Road: History of the Jews of England

Susannah Alexander made a welcome return

Surprise Party



AJR Director Carol Rossen was so taken aback by the surprise 60th birthday party the staff threw in her honour that, at first, she

'Where did the time go?'

couldn't even recognise her own grandchildren waiting there to see her! She could hardly believe she'd been working at the AJR for almost three decades, Carol said. Where on earth had the time gone?

visit to talk to us about the history of the Jews in England, this time from Disraeli onwards. She divided her talk into: patterns of Jewish immigration; development of Zionist and counter-Zionist movements; the rise of Jewish religious diversity. From January 2008, our meetings will be held on the last Tuesday of each month. *David Lang*

Next meeting: 18 Dec. George Layton, 'An Actor's Life'

Edgware talk on British Jewry

Elkan Levy gave us a very interesting talk on the history of British Jewry, which goes back much longer than most of us thought. How many of our co-religionists have elevated themselves from the poverty of their forefathers to their present-day status, he asked. *Felix Winkler*

Next meeting: 18 Dec. Late Chanukah Party and Naomi Hyamson

A welcome for Wembleyites

We met once again in the surrounding of Harris Court, welcoming about 20 'Wembleyites', including two new visitors. We understand there are quite a few more AJR members residing in our area whom we haven't seen yet. *Tom Heinemann*

Next meeting: 17 Dec.

Harrogate Continental Friends

We mourned the loss of Ruth Simmonds, one of our original members, who had recently died. Five absentees missed an interesting afternoon during which, inevitably, experiences of long ago evoked animated discussion. Of special interest was Suzanne Ripton's account of a visit to a group of Muslim youngsters in Bradford; hopefully, her story will help these teenagers look at life without prejudice. *Inge Little*

Next meeting: 13 or 20 Feb (tbc)

Cambridge: South African Jewry

Dr Sheila Marshall told us that Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe and, later, from Nazi Germany settled in South Africa. Following the Apartheid years, the black Africans with the help of Jewish sympathisers set up their own government. Today, unfortunately, crime and corruption are rife, she said. *Ruth Brown*

Next meeting: 20 Dec. Chanukah Party

Weald of Kent: The story of Kitchener Camp

Prof Clare Ungerson spoke about the refugee camp in her native town of Sandwich which provided a haven for over 4,000 men thrown into concentration camps after Kristallnacht. We learned of the tireless efforts of influential Jewish leaders and local community members to welcome the men and provide for their welfare. *Janet Weston*

Enjoying bagels in North London

Frank Miller spoke about the history of the bagel. Suffice it to say that the bagel has

been eaten and enjoyed for many years – and was so once again at the end of the talk by over 40 members with cream cheese and smoked salmon (or lox if one prefers the American name).

Herbert Haberberg

Next meeting: 20 Dec. Late Chanukah Party

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Wessex Chanukah Party and Naomi Hyamson. Details to follow

Kingston Continental Friends Details to follow

THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE

A Liverpool Commemoration through Art and Literature
24 January 2008

For research purposes for the above event, which is taking place as a National Holocaust Memorial Day event prior to Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2008, the organisers would like to make contact with anyone who came to Liverpool in 1938-46 as a refugee or a survivor from Nazi Europe.

If you know of anyone who came to Liverpool at that time, please contact Susanne Green on 0151 291 5734 or at j.l.green@blueyonder.co.uk

AJR GROUP CONTACTS

Bradford Continental Friends
Lilly and Albert Waxman 01274 581189

Brighton & Hove (Sussex Region)
Fausta Shelton 01273 734 648

Bristol/Bath
Kitty Balint-Kurti 0117 973 1150

Cambridge
Anne Bender 01223 276 999

Cardiff
Myrna Glass 020 8385 3077

Cleve Road, AJR Centre
Myrna Glass 020 8385 3077

Dundee
Susanne Green 0151 291 5734

East Midlands (Nottingham)
Bob Norton 01159 212 494

Edgware
Ruth Urban 020 8931 2542

Edinburgh
Françoise Robertson 0131 337 3406

Essex (Westcliff)
Larry Lisner 01702 300812

Glasgow
Claire Singerman 0141 649 4620

Harrogate
Inge Little 01423 886254

Hendon
Hazel Beiny 020 8385 3070

Hertfordshire
Hazel Beiny 020 8385 3070

HGS
Gerda Torrence 020 8883 9425

Hull
Susanne Green 0151 291 5734

Ilford
Meta Rosenell 020 8505 0063

Leeds HSFA
Trude Silman 0113 2251628

Fiddler in the Dress Circle

The Savoy Theatre saw an invasion of elderly but very lively people who laid claim to the best seats in the Dress Circle. The occasion was an AJR outing to see *Fiddler on the Roof*, starring Henry Goodman. Some 100 members took the opportunity both to see the performance and to meet up with friends.

It was generally agreed that this production was one of the best.

After the performance, we were asked to stay behind when the rest of the audience left and, to our surprise, Henry Goodman joined us in the Dress Circle. He had suddenly become much younger than a short time before when he was Tevye the Milkman! As he was due to go on stage again that evening, his time was limited but he happily chatted to members. Congratulations to the AJR for arranging such an excellent afternoon!



Fiddler on the Roof star Henry Goodman took time out with AJR members

George Vulkan

Liverpool
Susanne Green 0151 291 5734

Manchester
Werner Lachs 0161 773 4091

Newcastle
Walter Knoblauch 0191 2855339

Norfolk (Norwich)
Myrna Glass 020 8385 3077

North London
Jenny Zundel 020 8882 4033

Oxford
Susie Bates 01235 526 702

Pinner (HA Postal District)
Vera Gellman 020 8866 4833

Sheffield
Steve Mendelsson 0114 2630666

South London
Lore Robinson 020 8670 7926

South West Midlands (Worcester area)
Myrna Glass 020 8385 3070

Surrey
Edmée Barta 01372 727 412

Weald of Kent
Max and Jane Dickson
01892 541026

Wembley
Laura Levy 020 8904 5527

Wessex (Bournemouth)
Mark Goldfinger 01202 552 434

West Midlands (Birmingham)
Ernest Aris 0121 353 1437

Paul Balint AJR Centre
15 Cleve Road, London NW6
Tel: 020 7328 0208

AJR CHANUKAH PARTY

Wednesday 12 December 2007
11.45 am for 12.15 pm

Please be aware that members should not automatically assume that they are on the Luncheon Club list. It is now necessary, on receipt of your copy of the *AJR Journal*, to phone the Centre on 020 7328 0208 to book your place.

KT-AJR KT CHANUKAH PARTY

Monday 10 December 2007

Reservations required
Please telephone 020 7328 0208

Monday, Wednesday & Thursday
9.30 am - 3.30 pm

Kindly note that with immediate effect, lunch will be served at 1.00pm on Mondays

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE CENTRE IS CLOSED ON TUESDAYS

December Afternoon Entertainment

Mon 3	Kards & Games Klub
Tue 4	CLOSED
Wed 5	Margaret Opdahl
Thur 6	Francis Spiegel
Mon 10	KT CHANUKAH PARTY
Tue 11	CLOSED
Wed 12	AJR CHANUKAH PARTY
Thur 13	Michael Heaton
Mon 17	Kards & Games Klub
Tue 18	CLOSED
Wed 19	Jack & Rita Davis
Thur 20	Naomi Hyamson
Mon 24	CLOSED
Tue 25	CLOSED
Wed 26	CLOSED
Thur 27	CLOSED

'DROP IN' ADVICE SERVICE

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

Hazel Beiny, Southern Groups Co-ordinator
020 8385 3070

Myrna Glass, London South and Midlands Groups Co-ordinator
020 8385 3077

Susanne Green, Northern Groups Co-ordinator
0151 291 5734

Susan Harrod, Groups' Administrator
020 8385 3070

KT-AJR (Kindertransport)
Andrea Goodmaker 020 8385 3070

Child Survivors Association-AJR
Henri Obstfeld 020 8954 5298

FAMILY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Death

Eton Bruce (né Bruno Einhorn) MBE, MD, FRCOG. I report with regret the death of my husband, at the age of 93. He was born in Berlin, studied medicine in Italy and finally qualified in Manchester. He served in the RAMC until 1946 and, after specialising, was consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist to the Hastings group of hospitals. He will be sadly missed by his daughter Rachel, son-in-law Martin and grandsons Jonathan and Matthew; his son David, daughter-in-law Nicole and granddaughter Millie; and his many patients in the Hastings area.

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COPY DATE 5 weeks prior to publication

**AJR TRIP TO ISRAEL
MARCH 2008**

At the request of our members, the AJR are arranging a 10-day trip to Israel next March

This will be a fantastic opportunity to travel in a group and enable you to visit places such as Jerusalem, the North, Tel Aviv and Lake Kinneret

The group are planning to stay at the 4-star King Solomon Hotel in Netanya on a half-board basis

Please note that there will be walking involved and it is important that you are able to walk independently
If you wish to go on this trip, please fill in the form enclosed with this issue of the Journal

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

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Members who might not otherwise be able to afford homecare please contact:

**Estelle Brookner, Secretary
AJR Social Services Dept
Tel: 020 8385 3070**

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Can you help?

Giving a guarantee in Nazi times saved Jews

There are still gaps in the records of how many of us got out of Nazi Europe. At that time of unspeakable danger, everyone was busy striving to survive. Fortunately, due to our ancestors getting out of Nazi-occupied Europe, finding work, and recovering after internment camps, bombing, or army service, very many of us are now here and alive to tell the tale.

Recording those who saved us or helped us, and what assistance they gave 50 years and more later, is not easy! If you are able to assist, so that any records we leave behind are more accurate, please take this opportunity.

The Quakers, also known as the Society of Friends, burned their records of the London Refugee Committee at a time when it seemed possible that Hitler might invade Britain. They did not wish

*I believe it is our obligation
to record our history,
especially when we owe
our lives to others.
Better late than never!*

to risk leaving names and addresses of the Jews they had saved and helped falling into the wrong hands.

I am now trying to get information on the obligations that were undertaken by any person who stood as guarantor for a Jew to escape from Nazi Europe. The then prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, did not want to have people admitted to the UK who

might become a financial burden on the country.

I am keen to discover what obligation the guarantors undertook and need answers to the following questions:

1. How long was the period for which a guarantor was liable?
2. What did the guarantee cover – presumably shelter and food?
3. In those times there was no free education. Were guarantors responsible for paying for our education? Quakers gave my brother and me two free years at a Quaker boarding school, after which my father was able to afford to pay the fees. Did providing a guarantee oblige the guarantor to pay school fees?
4. As a child of ten, I had a hernia operation and remember being given my first-ever watch as a present by our guarantor. There was no National Health Service in those days. Were guarantors responsible for our medical and dental care?

Will readers of the *AJR Journal* who have any information on what obligations those who saved us undertook, or can advise on where I can obtain further information on the subject, please contact me!

I believe it is our obligation to record our history, especially when we owe our lives to others. Better late than never! If you can, please help.

Dr Peter F. Kurer
7 Bruntwood Lane
Cheadle, Cheshire
SK8 1HS
peter@kurer.co.uk
tel 0161 428 5080

Arts and Events Diary – December

Sundays 2, 9, 16 December '3GH: A Workshop for 3rd Generation Holocaust Descendants' Venue: Wiener Library. Contact 3GH@wienerlibrary.co.uk or tel 07851 754 824

Mon 3 Peter Ritzer, 'Life in Germany Today' Club 43

Thur 6 Chanukah Party B'nai B'rith Jerusalem Lodge. Tel Tom Heinemann on 07973 137 718

Mon 10 Dr Steven Kern, "'His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens': German

and Austrian Refugees in the British Armed Forces in World War II' Club 43

Wed 12 Prof Jan Gross, 'Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz' Wiener Library, 7.00 pm. Tel 020 7636 7247 or email wienerlibrary.co.uk

Mon 17 Informal Chanumas Evening with Readings in English and German Club 43

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

Central Office for Holocaust Claims Michael Newman

Holocaust insurance claims

Under the terms of the Holocaust Insurance Accountability Act, insurance companies which operate in the United States now have to disclose the names of all Holocaust-era policy-holders and create a registry of those lists for survivors and their heirs. The Act also provides funds to the US Secretary of State to work with European countries in order to make information on the policies more publicly available.

The new law also makes provision for survivors to bring claims against insurance companies in US courts.

Passing the bill in October, the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee was heavily critical of the work of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims (ICHEIC). The bill's sponsors assert that only 5 per cent of claims submitted to ICHEIC were settled satisfactorily.

ICHEIC distributed over \$305 million (approximately £150m) to just over 48,000 claimants, having received claims from over 91,000 applicants.

German Association

Although the Insurance Commission (ICHEIC) wound up its work in March this year, it is still possible to enter claims for policies sold by insurers which had previously been part of the Commission. The German Insurance Association (GDV) has announced that its members will continue to consider any Holocaust-era claims filed directly with a company. To contact a company direct, visit the GDV's website www.gdv.de

Claims for policies sold by Generali can still be submitted to the Italian insurer. Further details about this scheme are available at www.nazierainsurancesettlement.com

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

In retrospect

As I am retiring from the AJR, may I be forgiven for looking back on highlights of my service to the refugee community? The Jewish environment and camaraderie have been a pleasure to work in and my relationship with AJR members has been very warm, especially with the Kindertransportees, whose formal entry into the AJR I am pleased to have helped negotiate with Bertha Leverton and the late David Jedwab.

It was a privilege to work with Richard Grunberger, distinguished editor of *AJR Information*. My responsibilities were to write, commission and edit articles, report events and lectures, take photographs for publication, and produce a monthly layout and design. I reported my visit to Polish death camps, scripted the first AJR website, and wrote my own opinion columns. Having persuaded the AJR that an updated presentation would help to maintain the AJR's unique monthly publication, Nova Western's design was adopted by the Association as its new image. I appreciated the knowledge possessed by Marion Koebner and Howard Spier, who succeeded me as Executive Editor.

In 1995 I visited the recently opened Holocaust Education Centre at Beth Shalom in Nottinghamshire and reported the genuine inspiration of Stephen Smith and his family, which has developed over 12 years. Their ambitious educational programmes soon received the AJR's continuing support.

Having introduced Tony Grenville to the bound copies of *AJR Information* and invited him to write a history of the Association, he undertook soon after to research among the magazines one day a week from that time on. His completed book will be a major landmark in preserving the history of the German-speaking Jewish refugee community and its heartland. He co-authored, with Bea Lewkowicz, the *Continental Britons'* exhibition – whose organising committee I chaired – and the AJR's *Refugee Voices* video archive.

Appointed a Director of the AJR with enhanced responsibilities, I oversaw the development of additional groups with Claims Conference funds, to 35-40 today, making the AJR a truly national organisation. Myrna Glass in the South and Susanne Green in the North, who reported to me and benefited from Marcia Goodman's input, achieved exceptional success.

With the introduction of Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) in 2000, I encouraged

the AJR to give key support to organisers of HMD events at Imperial College and Sussex University, which continues to present a purposeful programme on campus, backed by AJR funding. I represented the AJR on World Jewish Relief's committee organising the installation ceremonies of the Kindertransport statue at Liverpool Street Station, a great occasion for Anglo-Jewry.

Having conceived the idea of narrating the refugees' outstanding contribution to their country of adoption by way of an exhibition marking the 60th anniversary of the AJR, the project received the generous support of the AJR in co-operation with the Jewish Museum, the Wiener Library, the Imperial War Museum and the Jewish Music Festival. Lord Moser was the opening night's guest of honour. Tony Grenville added a splendid short refugee history and Bea Lewkowicz produced a film of refugee testimonies and, with Carol Seigel, developed a series of complementary events.

Manchester AJR Chairman Werner Lachs rose to my challenge to record their own special history. With the co-operation of Manchester University, and support from the AJR, respected local historian Bill Williams masterminded an extensive research project and a resultant book.

I was pleased to be part of Anne Marx's luncheon club at the AJR Day Centre. Similarly successful have been the monthly Kindertransport lunches, which I helped to establish. Thanks to Susie Kaufman, I played the piano in public there for the first time and also experienced my only *Chazanut* performance when singing Yom HaShoah memorial prayers.

As a 'younger' and always active element among the membership, I assisted Hermann Hirschberger, Chairman of the Kinder, and Bertha Leverton to create a questionnaire for a major survey of their experiences, backed by the AJR, which should provide a definitive Kindertransport archive. Together, we are planning a 70th anniversary celebration for 2008!

I take pride in that during my term of office the standards of the magazine have been retained, the cultural and historical record of the refugee immigration has been augmented and strengthened, while the membership level has been maintained against the odds, thereby providing social and practical help and support for many more ageing refugees and survivors in all parts of the country.

Newsround

Sir Nicholas Winton nominated for Nobel Prize

Following a nationwide campaign in the Czech Republic, Karel Schwarzenberg, the Czech Foreign Minister, has nominated the 98-year-old Sir Nicholas Winton for the Nobel Prize. The announcement was made as Sir Nicholas was given a hero's welcome in Prague, from where he rescued hundreds of Jewish children from death in Nazi concentration camps. In an emotional ceremony attended by some of the – now elderly – children he rescued, he was also awarded the Czech Republic's top military honour.

New memorial centre for Bergen-Belsen

A new memorial exhibition centre has opened at the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. The exhibition is the first stage of an overall renovation of the camp intended to document more accurately prisoners' experiences there. It will be several years before all the suggested changes are completed.

Holocaust memorial planned for Milan

Italy's first Holocaust museum is to be completed in 2009 and located in a Milan railway station which was used to deport Jews in the Second World War. Italy is the only major European country which does not have a Holocaust memorial.

'Storm trooper' church for sale

The Martin Luther Memorial Church in the southern Berlin district of Mariendorf, which contains altar carvings of German storm troopers, is to be offered for sale. Originally consecrated in 1933, the church was closed for safety reasons three years ago. Parishioners failed to raise some of the estimated £2.5 million required to restore its tower, while trying to secure the rest of the money from the government in Berlin.

'Hitler and Wagner would turn in their graves'

Daniel Barenboim is to lead his ensemble, the Divan Orchestra, which features Israeli and Palestinian musicians, in a performance of *Die Walküre* by Hitler's favourite composer, Wagner, next year. The performance is to take place at the Waldbühne, the outdoor arena built for the Berlin Olympics in 1936. 'Hitler and Wagner would turn in their graves,' Barenboim said.