

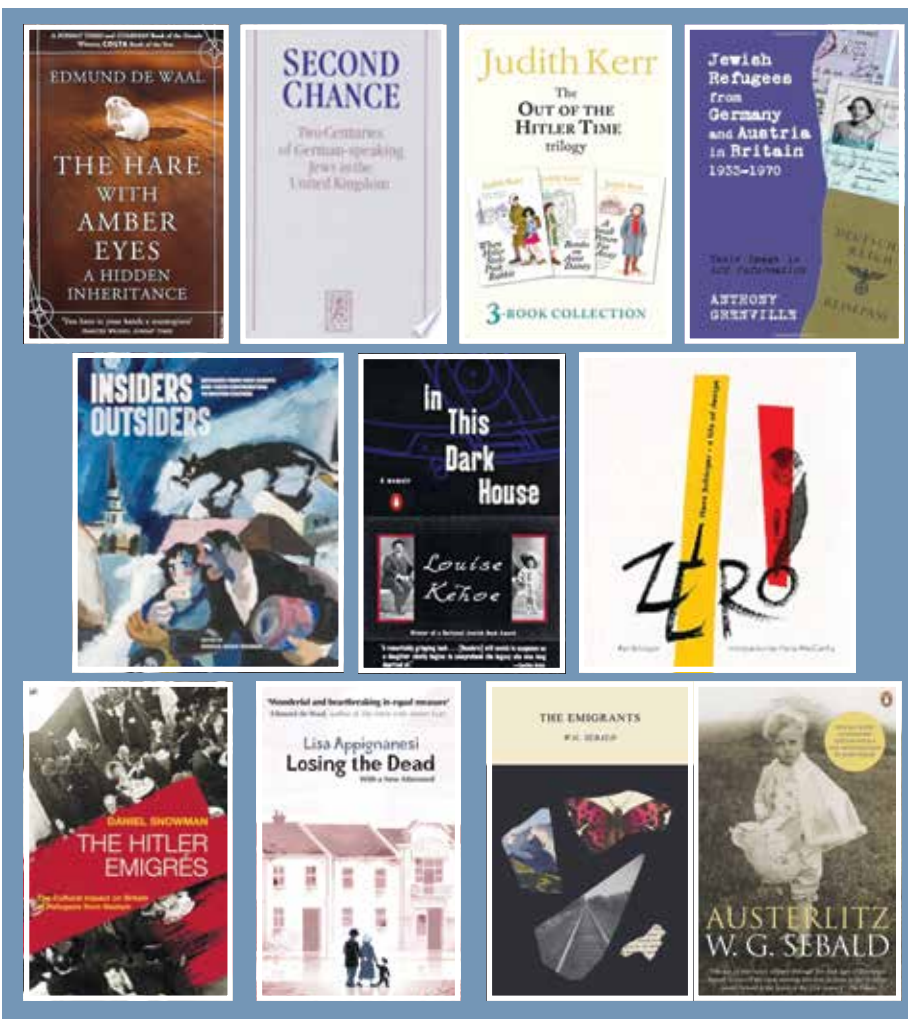


# AJR JOURNAL

The Association of Jewish Refugees

## Essential reading

David Herman offers his personally-selected list of Top 10 books by or about Anglo-Jewish refugees from Nazism.



Since the 1970s, and especially since the 1990s, there has been an explosion in books by and about Jewish refugees who came to Britain, fleeing Nazism. They come in many different forms. Some of the books are memoirs, such as Judith Kerr's famous trilogy, *Out of the Hitler Time* (1971-78), Louise Kehoe's powerful account of her father, the architect, Berthold Lubetkin, *In This Dark House* (1996), Anne Karpf's *The War After* (1996), Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* (1999) and Edmund de Waal's *The Hare*

with *Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (2010); others are biographies, such as Pat Schlegel's *Zero: Hans Schlegel – a life of design* (2001); some are fiction, such as WG Sebald's masterpieces, *The Emigrants* (1993) and *Austerlitz* (2001); and there are also fine history books, including Anthony Grenville's *Jewish Refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain 1933-1970* (2010) and a collection of essays, *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (1991), edited  
*Continued on page 2*

### SHANA TOVAH

As we mark both the start of another new year in the Hebrew calendar and the first anniversary of the 7 October massacre, it seems appropriate that many of this month's articles are written by descendants of Holocaust survivors.

Denise Fluskey's written portrait of growing up with her artist father (p.10-11) is especially poignant, as is Susan Hamlyn's tale of returning her grandfather's postcards to Belgium (p.13).

Meanwhile our First Generation members are not to be outdone, with four of them recently making a remarkable journey to Prague to help rename a street there.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and look forward to receiving your comments.

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*Please note that the views expressed throughout this publication are not necessarily the views of the AJR.*

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## Essential reading (cont.)

by Werner E. Mosse et al. and Daniel Snowman's *The Hitler Emigrés: The Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism* (2002).

Why were the 1990s such a significant turning-point for books about Jewish refugees and the Holocaust? Suddenly, there was a new interest in the Holocaust, and with it, the history of Jewish refugees. In 1985 Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* appeared and changed the way we think about the Holocaust; in 1991 Art Spiegelman published his family memoir, *Maus*; in 1993 Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List* appeared; in the same year, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington DC, followed less than a decade later by Daniel Liebeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. With the fall of Soviet Communism came the opening of new archives in east Europe and the former Soviet Union which led to a transformation of Holocaust history. New films, new museums, new fiction, new history books, changed the way we think about the Holocaust and this opened the way for a new wave of books about Jewish refugees.

There was also a new second generation who wanted to tell their family stories. Books like Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989) and *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, were attempts by a new generation of writers to come to terms with the experience of their parents during the Holocaust and as they tried to come to terms with exile.

Here is a list of my Top Ten books by and about Jewish refugees. First, Judith Kerr's trilogy, *Out of the Hitler Time*, the story of how her family fled from Berlin

to Switzerland, then Paris and finally to London. Exile was a double-edged experience for Alfred Kerr and his family. They escaped but by the time they came to Britain, he was almost seventy. He had been Germany's leading theatre critic but in exile he lost his audience and his language. The family were to spend the next thirteen years in poverty. Judith describes her father in a moving scene: "In her mind she saw him in his poky room with his typewriter that kept going wrong and his writings that no one wanted to publish, in a country whose language he did not speak." In the final book of the trilogy, Anna (based on Judith) recalls how her mother "kept the family together." But then the mother explodes. She is in hospital after attempting suicide. It was the children who adapted most easily. Judith was 12 when they arrived in Britain, her brother Michael was 14. Within four years he was studying law at Cambridge and went on to become a distinguished judge, Sir Michael Kerr QC. She became a famous writer.

In *Second Chance*, Werner E. Mosse and his colleagues tell the history of German-speaking Jews in Britain over 200 years including 20<sup>th</sup> century refugees. It's an impressive group of contributors, including Peter Pulzer, Herbert A. Strauss and Tony Kushner, and over more than 660 pages they cover everything from psychoanalysis and historians to publishers, physicists and political science.

Anthony Grenville's *Jewish Refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain 1933-1970: Their Image in AJR Information* is much shorter but just as fascinating. It focuses on ordinary Jewish refugees rather than more famous figures, asks interesting questions about why refugees stayed in Britain rather than moving to America or Palestine, and is neither full of old-fashioned pieties or the revisionist tone of the Young Turks of the 1980s and 1990s.

Daniel Snowman's *The Hitler Emigrés* is more about the impact of refugees on postwar British culture and is particularly good on how many refugees were bridge-builders, connecting the central European culture they came from with British culture. They were good at assimilating, creating famous institutions from Glyndebourne to the Edinburgh Festival. It's a positive picture, a rich cultural history superbly told.

There are, of course, darker stories. Louise Kehoe's memoir of her childhood, *In This Dark House*, uncovers the secret story of her tyrannical father, the brilliant modernist architect, Berthold Lubetkin. Then there are Sebald's masterpieces, *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*. The stories in *The Emigrants* tells the story of four different characters, all emigrants, three of whom have roots in central Europe. So does Jacques Austerlitz, the central figure in Sebald's novel, *Austerlitz*. He comes to Britain as a child refugee and later goes in search of his parents to try and discover their fate.

*The Hare with Amber Eyes* is a different kind of family memoir, tracing the story of the Ephrussi family, a wealthy banking dynasty, from Odessa to Paris and Vienna, told through the fate of mysterious Japanese ivory figures. Lisa Appignanesi's memoir, *Losing the Dead*, is one of a fascinating group of family memoirs published in the mid-1990s. It tells the story of how her family, Polish Jews, survived in wartime Poland and how their experience explained her childhood in post-war Canada.

*Insiders Outsiders: Refugees from Nazi Europe and their Contribution to British Visual Culture* is a fascinating book of essays on the cultural impact of Jewish refugees who came to Britain, ranging from art scholarship to publishers, dealers and collectors, from wartime propaganda to the Festival of Britain. It is full of up-to-date scholarship and clearly written throughout.

Finally, *Zero: Hans Schleger – a life of design*, by his widow Pat Schleger, tells the larger story of refugees through the life of a German-Jewish graphic designer who created some of the most enduring icons of postwar British life, from the London bus stop to John Lewis, Penguin Books and Mac Fisheries.

Between them, these books mix fiction and history, the dark side of displacement and the creative energy so many refugees brought to British life. In very different ways they tell the complex story of displacement and exile superbly.

**We would love to receive recommendations of other 'essential' books from our readers – please send your own top 3 or even top 10 list to [editorial@ajr.org.uk](mailto:editorial@ajr.org.uk).**

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# (RE)CLAIMING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

(Re)claiming European citizenship is a hot topic within the AJR community. Whether or not to apply; who is eligible; how to apply; how long does the process take, and the reasons behind wanting European citizenship led to many interesting debates which is why we chose to hold our Citizenship event on a sunny Sunday afternoon in August.

Speakers included representatives from the German, Austrian and Czech embassies who were able to give insider advice on their application processes. Also sharing their knowledge were AJR second-generation members who are experts on specific topics such as the EU Passport Project, voting rights for new Austrian citizens, and the Article 116 Reconciliation Project for German citizens. The last panel featured a conversation between



AJR Citizenship Event Belsize Square Synagogue

mother and daughter (2G and 3G) about the emotional context behind applying for European citizenship.

**Debra Barnes, AJR Next Generations Manager, said** "The AJR has excellent relationships with the relevant embassies in the UK and we're delighted to be able to assist our members to reconnect with a part of their identity that the Nazis took away from their parents and grandparents. In so doing, we are honoured to enable the next generations to continue their family legacy."

**Annie Lew, 3G, said** "When I decided to

*apply for German citizenship, it wasn't about the benefits of travelling abroad, it felt like something profound in my family history. An opportunity to move on from what was taken away from my grandmother and incredibly symbolic in its retribution. I was very taken aback by the emotion I felt and just how healing the process was."*

In response to requests from members who were not able to attend the event in August, we are hoping to run a series of online events on the subject over the coming months.

## FROM HERE ON

Harwich Beach and Liverpool Street Station might not seem obvious places for a theatre premiere but they were both perfect locations for a fresh theatrical production about displacement, movement and being forced to find a new home.

*From Here On* brings history to life alongside global stories of children seeking safety now. It was performed with casts of local young people in Harwich, London and The Hague in August & September 2024, with another performance taking place in Berlin on 2 October.

The AJR, which is now the UK's largest dedicated funder of programmes and projects which promote teaching



From Here On, London Show

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and learning about the Holocaust, is delighted to have been able to support these premieres – which have already been watched by over 4,000 people – through our educational grants programme.

AJR's support also included four members of our Kindertransport committee (Tanya Novick, Nick Sigler, Linda Reich and Danny Kalman) attending rehearsals and sharing their personal stories with the performers, thus helping the latter to understand a little more about the Kindertransport.

Tanya, whose mother Franziska Marion Lesser was rescued via Kindertransport from Berlin in July 1939, subsequently watched one of the London premiere performances at Liverpool Street Station. She described it as "very moving and beautiful. They conveyed the persecution, heartbreak and eventual arrival to safety with movement and background sound in front of a large and enthusiastic audience".

*From Here On* is co-produced by Good Chance and Gecko Theatre. Find out more: [www.goodchance.org.uk/fromhereon](http://www.goodchance.org.uk/fromhereon)

# AJR TAKES TO THE STREET IN PRAGUE



Four Kinder (seated) were at the heart of the AJR's delegation to the event



An artist puts finishing touches to a mural underneath the railway bridge that forms part of Prague's new civic memorial to Sir Nicholas Winton



The new street sign is unveiled

**Last month an AJR delegation travelled to Prague to attend the naming of a new street in the Czech capital in honour of Sir Nicholas Winton, the man credited with organising the Czech Kindertransport.**

The delegation included Alexandra Pfeifer who, at the age of seven, Alexandra Pfeifer was taken by her father and two brothers to Prague railway station, and told she was going on holiday. "I didn't know where or why I was going. I didn't know there was a place called England. I waved to my brothers out of the window when the train left the station," she said.

In early September 92-year-old Alexandra Greensted – her married name – returned to Prague to help rename the new street.

It is in Holešovice, Prague 7 district, whose Mayor Jan Čížinský spoke of Winton's "heroism, courage and

humility". He explained how, once complete, the new thoroughfare will connect Veletržní and Dělnická Streets and follow the walking route taken to the ghettos and concentration camps from Bubny railway station. The street will also be crossed by a railway corridor which follows the route of the former Jewish deportations, while a number of nearby art installations will commemorate the stories and experiences of the former child refugees.

The naming of the street coincided with the 85th anniversary of the last planned Kindertransport from Prague, which was prevented from departing due to the outbreak of WW2. The 250 children onboard the train were deported to Nazi concentration camps and only two survived the war.

The AJR delegation included four surviving 'Winton children' as well as members of Winton's family. Lady Milena Grenfell-Baines, one of the former Kinder, remarked: "It is deeply moving to be standing here in Prague alongside fellow Winton children, 85 years since the Nazis tore our worlds apart. It was through the

resourceful and courageous actions of Sir Nicholas Winton and colleagues, that so many Czech Jews were given the chance to make a new life in Great Britain. So today, together with The AJR, we are filled with pride to pay tribute to our saviour and a great sadness for those we had to leave behind."

AJR Chief Executive Michael Newman said: "In remembering Sir Nicholas, we also honour the parents who sent away their children to an uncertain future as well as the foster families who gave sanctuary to the youngest victims of Nazi oppression. It is our fervent hope that this memorial will educate and instil in all audiences this vital history, and that the salvation of the Kindertransport will never again be needed."

These thoughts were echoed by Petr Papoušek, Chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, who said: "Naming a street after Sir Nicholas Winton is not only a tribute to his legacy, but also a clear reminder of the values we must constantly uphold – compassion, courage and justice".

# DOROTHEA SHEFER-VANSON'S LETTER FROM ISRAEL



## HOME SWEET HOME



Life in Israel is anything but sweet at the moment, with a difficult political situation, war in Gaza, over one

hundred hostages still being held by Hamas and the heat of high summer. And yet, coming back to our home after being away for over a month was sweet and enjoyable.

Our two-day journey to Marseille from central France was long and arduous, despite being broken by an overnight stay in Lyon and an enjoyable family visit there. The burden of driving fell entirely on my own, and despite the good roads and fairly frequent pit stops for rest and food it was a strain on our minds and bodies, which are not as young and agile as they once were. The night flight back was relatively short, but provided little opportunity to rest because of the presence nearby of a

courageous young mother with her four children.

It was comforting to find our house clean and in good condition, and as dawn broke we were able to enjoy the sight of the sun rising over the Judaeen hills, and relish the bright Mediterranean light. We were able to collect our new car from the agency and go to our favourite restaurant in nearby Abu Ghosh for lunch. As we parked, one of the waiters came to greet us and congratulated us on our new car. We are customers there of long standing, it's true, but to be able to recognize which car we drive is quite a feat. After all, hundreds of people eat there every week. The other waiters came out to join him, and a lively discussion about the pros and cons of the various cars followed. The whole experience (as well as the enjoyable meal) gave us the feeling of being welcomed and happy to be home again.

As the weekend approaches we look forward to meeting up with our children and grandchildren once more, and have already spoken to most of them on the phone. The resumption of our traditional Friday night family meal is one of the highlights of our week, giving us an

opportunity to catch up on the lives of our nearest and dearest and also to share with them our experiences of our time abroad.

Music plays an important role in our life, whether in Israel or abroad, but it is always a special pleasure to be able once again to turn on the radio at almost any time of the day or night and hear good music introduced by Hebrew-speaking announcers. Naturally, the radio announcements on the music programme in France speak in French which, despite our best efforts, we can't always understand. In addition, many of those programmes involve lengthy discussions or erudite analyses (always in French), which cut short the actual time devoted to music. Besides this, every day there is a two-hour slot, between six and eight in the evening, devoted to jazz, which is not quite our taste. We try to time our evening stroll for that period, but it doesn't always work out, and we certainly can't keep walking for two hours.

And so, despite the joys of life in France, there's no escaping the banal truth that there's no place like home.

## TESTIMONY 360

AJR staff had the chance to try out a very innovative educational programme during our September staff meeting.

Testimony 360 is a free digital education programme from the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) that combines digital eyewitness testimony with virtual reality, revolutionising access to survivor testimony and providing an invaluable opportunity for students learning about the Holocaust.

It centres around a 2.5-hour workshop using interactive eyewitness testimony and Virtual Reality (VR)



AJR staff trying out the new Testimony 360 virtual reality headsets

technology. Students will be able to have a conversational experience with a Holocaust survivor, and see historical sites associated with the Holocaust, all without leaving the classroom.

AJR member Manfred Goldberg BEM is one of four survivors who have recorded testimony for the project. Manfred, who survived four concentration camps and a death march, hopes that Testimony 360 will

help to change the way that the Holocaust is taught about in schools.

Testimony 360 is now being rolled out across schools throughout the UK, targeting students in Years 9-13, with HET reporting that the first tranche of available sessions was booked out within days.

More information at [www.het.org.uk/testimony360-signup](http://www.het.org.uk/testimony360-signup)

# Letters to the Editor

The Editor reserves the right to shorten correspondence submitted for publication and respectfully points out that the views expressed in the letters published are not necessarily the views of the AJR.

## LIFE WITHOUT ISRAEL

I think Dorothea Shefer-Vanson's letter from Israel in your August edition should be required reading for all Jewish people in the diaspora. She asks – are we to see in the Middle East a repeat of the events in Europe of the mid-20th century? She notes how frightening the current rise of antisemitism worldwide is to all Jews, observant or not. She emphasises that without Israel every Jew everywhere will be even more vulnerable than they already are. Much love has been lavished on the creation of Israel. Its enemy wants to wipe the country and its Jewish population off the map. Israel has the absolute right to defend itself. Amen.  
*Peter Phillips, Loudwater, Herts.*

## PERSISTENCE CAN PAY

In your May 2024 issue I wrote about my frustrating efforts to renew my British Passport. Here is an update.

For those who did not see the original letter, my situation was that I had an expired British passport in one family name, and a current Austrian one in (by Austria's choice, not mine) the birth name of my (Jewish Viennese) father. The UK Passport office declined to renew my UK passport because of the existence of a passport in a different name. This was despite me explaining the circumstances, and despite the intervention of my Member of Parliament. However, in a telephone conversation, the UK Passport Office assured me that my Austrian passport would include the information that I am a British citizen. When I last wrote, I had asked the Austrian embassy to confirm this.

That it did not – although nor did it deny the possibility. When, some time later, I received a Passport Office email threatening that if I didn't supply them with evidence that I had changed my "Austrian" name, they would cancel my application, I phoned them a second time, and asked, among things, whether there was a way to check the biometric data of my Austrian passport, to confirm the British citizenship information. The lady to

whom I spoke said she would email the people who needed to be informed and would copy her email to me.

The copy was not forthcoming, but very soon afterwards, I was astonished to receive an email telling me, without comment, that my application had been accepted. I was, if anything, even more startled to receive at 1 a.m. the following day an email saying that my new UK passport had been printed, and, to cap it all, the passport itself in the mail that very same day. I am now once more in possession of two valid passports, for Austria and the UK, in different family names, something I was repeatedly told was not allowed. The process took in total three months.

Any of your other members in this slightly odd position may like to know that sometimes persistence pays.

*Richard S. Henderson (or Hecht, as the case may be), Isle of Arran*

## LITHUANIA VICTIMS



Ilse Abramczyk, 1895-1941

Your August *Looking For* column mentioned a possible memorial stone at Kaunus in Lithuania and asked relatives of anyone murdered there on 29 November 1941 to get in touch. My mother's first cousin Ilse Abramczyk (1895-1941) was one of the thousand people rounded up in Breslau, transported to Kaunus and shot in a mass grave.

Ilse's PhD was on Plato. I own a small

1928 printed volume called *Platons dialog 'Kratylos' und das problem der sprach philosophie*. I'm not sure if this was her actual PhD or a subsequent, related essay, but I find the juxtaposition of the title with the last five words of the paragraph above particularly upsetting. It's not that I mind more about the *gebildet*, I certainly hope not. It's simply the horror of a deeply civilised life devoted to humanism (see below) ending in the most uncivilised, in fact barbaric, way imaginable.

There is a long paragraph about Ilse in my grandmother's *Chronicle* (which she wrote about our ancestors in the 1940s in Israel). Referring to Ilse's outstanding intelligence, she says: 'From the beginning she was particularly interested in humanism and in the civilisations of the East and took her degree in Greek philosophy and in Oriental languages. Many renowned scholars greatly appreciated her, such as Benedetto Croce. At Breslau students at the university from Eastern countries, Indians, Persians and Chinese, belonged to the always interesting set of her friends.' My grandmother also noted that Ilse was engaged to be married when she was 18 but her fiancé was killed mountain climbing, after which she devoted herself to her work and her family. 'With her scholarly mind she had also inherited the absent-mindedness of her father and a certain carelessness of her outward appearance. This disposition, combined with a rather frail constitution, were probably the cause of her lack of initiative and prevented her from finding a proper sphere of activity for her abilities.'

'Earlier than most people she saw the approaching disaster.' But of course she did not want to leave her elderly parents and by the time she thought of going to India (she had learnt Sanskrit) it was too late. We have her last letter to my mother, with it is a letter she had just received from the Jewish Relief Association in Bombay; it explained a) she would not be able to stand the climate b) she would need to guarantee an income for five years. The letters are

dated 16 and 26 August 1939. (If anyone reading this has not yet read Anita Desai's marvellous novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* please do so, you'll see the relevance as soon as you're a few pages in.)

In 2009 Alfred Konieczny of the University of Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) published a paper about what happened during those five days in November 1941. The facts came from the files of the Lower Silesia tax administration, which naturally have survived in full. We now know that one thousand people were taken by uniformed police from their apartments at about 6am. 'Dr. Ilse Abramczyk', living with her parents at an apartment at 75/77 Menzelstr (now Sztabowa St), was taken in a truck to the so-called Schiesswerder 'collection camp' (now Strzelecki Square). Other people were ordered to report to the House of Friends at Neue Graupenstrasse 3/4 (now Sądowa Street).

After four days in appalling conditions, the deportees were taken to Breslau station, from where the special train 'Da30' took them to Kaunas. The execution by firing squad was on Saturday 29 November. No one survived. 'She was fetched and deported to an unknown destination,' wrote my grandmother, 'and has never again been heard of'. I am very glad my mother, who adored her older cousin, never knew the details of her death. Of course knowing definitively might have been better than endlessly imagining.  
*Nicola Beauman, Bath*

**ERRATA**

In our August issue we incorrectly named the designers of the proposed Holocaust memorial at Westminster as Ron Arad Associates, when in fact the lead architect is Sir David Adjaye of Adjaye Associates.

In our September issue the caption for the photo of Rachel Meller's book, *The Box with the Sunflower Clasp*, described it as award-winning when in fact, as the accompanying article suggested, the book appeared on a shortlist for an award.



A number of AJR members based in North London recently met for lunch, facilitated by the AJR's Outreach team. An especially great connection was made between two ladies, both called Danielle, both born in France, both settled in Finsbury Park and both went to the same primary and secondary schools, albeit two years apart.

To join the next meeting please contact [Ros@ajr.org.uk](mailto:Ros@ajr.org.uk)

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# ART NOTES: by Gloria Tessler

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CONTEMPORARY  
PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

She was one of the few artists to focus in depth on the ravages of ageing. Paintings by the Viennese Jewish refugee artist, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky are currently on show in Burgh House in Hampstead, aptly named (in)Visible Women. Many describe her mother Henriette, with whom she lived in Amersham and Hampstead, and they are insightful portraits into their close connection, which she examined with painstaking and often painful revelations.

Motesiczky's early life was a charmed, if threatened, existence. She grew up in Vienna's Jewish bourgeoisie, surrounded by artists, writers, musicians and philosophers. She left home at 13 to take art classes in The Hague, Vienna, Paris and Berlin. Some of her early work showed the influence of Expressionist Max Beckmann, a well-known figure in the Motesiczky circle, who invited her to join his classes at the Stadelsschule in Frankfurt. During the following decade she painted still lifes and portraits. There is a powerful clarity in **Self Portrait with Comb**, painted in Paris in 1926, (not shown at Burgh House) in which Beckmann's imprint is clear, although she later moved away from his influence.



Self portrait in Blue, 1964, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Trust, London

But in 1938 everything changed as the Nazis marched in. The day after the Anschluss she and Henriette left for the Netherlands and then London, bringing with them the barest minimum. Her brother Karl, who remained in Vienna, sent many of their possessions, including her paintings to London, which were eventually housed in a house in Amersham they had bought in 1941 to escape the bombing raids. In London she met the writer Elias Canetti with whom she developed a 30 year long relationship. Her portrait of him is in the National Portrait Gallery. She exhibited widely, with many works now in public and private collections around the world, and she painted up to her death in 1996. But during her lifetime she rarely sold her work.

Motesiczky's paintings have a sketchy, insubstantial and almost ethereal quality. They appear inspired by dreams, emotions and even allegory. But all show a dedication to the essence of what it is to be a woman, **Three Heads**, which is in the Amersham Museum, indicates the imminent decline in a woman's years, from youth to the uncertainty of ageing. Her mother Henrietta modelled for such paintings as **Night and Day** and **The Old Song**. Henrietta missed Europe, could not settle in England, and became increasingly dependent on her daughter, who sketched and painted her at her bedside, and in this intimacy of love and the strain of imminent loss there is a purity and honesty which is very moving.

Despite hints of the influence of Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka in her work, the story she tells of a woman's destiny is redolent of Paula Regan, too.

Motesiczky's reflections on the ageing Henrietta are for me, the most important aspects of this exhibition, whether a simple sketch, sitting in her armchair, or with the artist kneeling at her bedside, or the two solitary sketches of Henrietta, her expression utterly devastated and almost skeletal as she contemplates her demise.

There are other themes. In **Lo and Lilly**, a blond-haired man and a brunette in a café or restaurant, suggest a romance is brewing, But he seems evasive and her expression has a certain glib smile. In **Family Portrait in the Garden**, a girl in a white dress kneels before a uniformed man reading a newspaper, while a nude bathes in a green tub in front of a flowering bush. To the right is an amorphous dark shrouded figure. Each figure is linked – again perhaps suggesting the different ages of woman. But the presence of the soldier adds another dimension. Is this a male fantasy? In **Self Portrait in Blue**, the artist holds a crayon and a drawing pad. She appears to be looking back at her youth and forward to old age.

*(In)Visible Women: Burgh House Hampstead until 15 December.*

# THE MYTH OF THE MUSEUM OF EXTINCTION

Many things have been written the Nazi's horrifying intentions and the majority of them are true. But their plan to create a 'museum to the extinct race' in Prague once they had finished exterminating all the Jews is simply a viral myth, according to AJR member Michael Heppner.



From left: Kisch's original collection of pre-war essays and the Jewish Museum in Prague where some of the 140,000 Jewish artefacts curated by the Nazis can be seen today

The notion of a "museum of an extinct race" celebrating the obliteration of the Jewish community was first spawned by the Austrian Jewish journalist and political activist Egon Erwin Kisch, on his return to Prague in 1946 from wartime exile in Mexico. Back home he was confronted by the shock of the enormous vacuum left by the genocide of the Czech Jews, and the loss of the vibrant culture of the extinguished Jewish community and everything that it had represented in every walk of life.

Like other returning survivors he tried to make sense of the devastation that surrounded him. 77,297 Jews murdered and well over 100,000 Jewish artefacts meticulously catalogued and stored in Prague's Central Jewish Museum. The largest single collection of Judaica in history.

The article that Kisch wrote after visiting the museum captured his response to its impact. Entitled *The Murderers built a Mausoleum for their Victims*, it seeded the myth of a Nazi plan for a 'museum of an extinct race'. It screams out with his feelings on facing the huge tragedy confronting him. Driven by the immediate need to make sense of a situation that defied cool, rational

analysis, he gave full vent to his emotions on paper. With the reality before his eyes who needed documentation? And with the German reputation for order, he assumed nothing was done without a plan.

His article opened with these words: 'This was the plan: to exterminate a nation of many millions and then to demonstrate by means of a museum which was to be established by the murderers, what fanatical and dangerous enemies of the millennial Third Reich the victims, i.e. the Jews, had been.'

That it was first published merely as an additional chapter to the English translation of Kisch's collection of pre-War essays, *Tales from Seven Ghettos*, with very limited circulation, meant that the essay had little immediate effect. But the idea was out there. It was developed further by Jiri Weil in his book *Mendelsohn is on the Roof*, and by academics seeking to explain and understand the Germans' thinking and rationale.

in 1965, Vilem Benda, then Communist director of the State Jewish Museum, adopted Kisch's notion and coined the phrase 'museum of an extinct race' as the cornerstone of a publicity drive for his museum among the tourist market. The moniker became tourism vernacular.

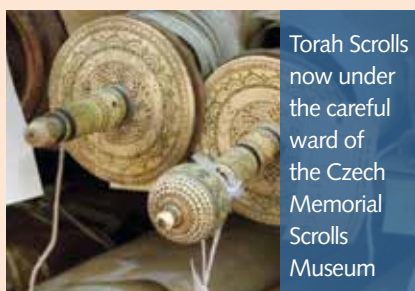
In 1983 it went viral when it featured in the guidebook for the *Precious Legacy* exhibition that toured the USA for three years. The fruits of Egon Erwin Kisch's anguished outburst forty years previously became a permanent part of the Prague Jewish tourist scene from then on.

Kisch's outrage was fully justified by the fact that when the Germans first seized the Jewish Museum in Prague in 1942, it only had 760 artifacts. By the time the Nazis were defeated the Prague Jewish Community had managed to bring to Prague over 140,000 artifacts from the deserted synagogues and communities of Bohemia and Moravia. It seemed obvious that the accumulation of such a hoard of treasures had to be part of a Nazi plan for a museum. But, in the absence of documentation, it is clear that this was not part of a plan. In reality, the Nazis were simply reacting to a series of situations.

In fact the enormous collection of artefacts was partly the result of the actions of a small group of brave leaders of Prague's beleaguered Jewish community. Desperate to protect the artefacts and treasures of their centuries of culture in Bohemia and Moravia from being looted and lost, Jewish leaders managed to manipulate their Nazis oppressors into saving their treasures. It was their hope that once the Nazi pogrom passed, as previous pogroms had passed, these treasures would then be restored to the revived communities.

Viral myths are notoriously hard to dispel, and the notion of a 'museum to an extinct race' that stemmed from that essay by Egon Erwin Kisch is still engrained in the tourist folklore of Prague. Most importantly of all, we have been able to sustain not just a collection of artefacts but a real semblance of Jewish life in central Europe.

This article is based on a longer piece, which can be seen on <https://www.ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk/egon-erwin-kisch>



# TO LIFE!

**As an Essex synagogue gets ready to celebrate the life and work of Stanislaw Brunstein, his daughter Denise Fluskey tries to paint a picture with words of growing up with this artist who survived some of the harshest conditions in Soviet prisons.**

My father was born in Warsaw in 1914 and studied art in Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. He worked as a satirical cartoonist for Polish and Yiddish newspapers, and a scenic designer for the Yiddish Theatre. In 1939 he fled into Soviet-occupied Poland only to be arrested for being a "bourgeois counter-revolutionary" and put in solitary confinement for 14 months, then sentenced to eight years hard labour in Siberia.

There was an early release for political prisoners and he joined the Polish 8th army, serving as a radio operator. After the Battle of Monte Cassino in 1944 he continued his art studies in Rome.

Discovering that he was the only surviving member of his entire family, his parents having been murdered in Treblinka, Stanislaw came to London, working in the East End as a scenic designer for the Yiddish theatre. There he met my actress mother, Esther Brunstein, a survivor of the Łódź Ghetto, Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen.

He then set up a small business manufacturing children's clothes. My

sister and I were born in the East End. We all moved to Ilford in 1956. After a life-threatening bout of pneumonia in 1962 my father resumed his art, continuing until he died in 1994. He produced over 1600 works. Many were sold but we still have c.100 in my loft. He had his first one man show in Oaks Lane synagogue, where we were members, in 1966.

That's the potted version of my father's life, but it actually says nothing about him as a man or of me as his daughter.

My father expressed himself in his paintings being more economical with words when it came to feelings. When he told us about certain experiences it was often relayed with a sense of adventure, a story to entertain, rather than frighten, a child. Fleeing Warsaw in 1939 because of the imminent threat of war was an exciting escape story about defying the powers that be and then hiding in a new town. As for his years in a slave labour camp in Siberia, again he spoke of adventures, how he ran from wolves and fought against the Arctic cold.

What he didn't mention was the most painful separation from his mother, who was unable to flee because her poor circulation affected her walking. His mother adored him and over-protected her only son all of his young life. Yet here she was, having to tell him to run for his life and to let him go, whilst fighting every instinct to hold him close. This excruciatingly painful separation, filled with profound uncertainty about the



Denise and her father Stanislaw enjoyed a close, if complicated, relationship

future, would impact greatly on my own capacity to manage loss and account for much separation anxiety of my own.

And the truth about prison where my father spent fourteen months in solitary confinement? He told me the cell was the size of a toilet and he had no contact with any other prisoners apart from tapping the water pipes using morse code. Later he said he nearly lost his mind and wanted to commit suicide. He suffered malnutrition and most of his teeth fell out. When I heard this I cried into my pillow rather than show my tears. The thought of my father being so deprived of nourishment, but also of everything else a person needs, like love and affection, family, a home, warmth and food, sitting alone in a tiny prison cell, played on my mind. My father of course did not know the fate of his parents at this time, but he must have been so terrified about what had happened to them and what would happen to him, and he could not escape from his terrible thoughts trapped in this prison cell. And I too, developed a suffocating feeling of claustrophobia as a young adult which has

## REMEMBERING 'CONVOI 77'

**The AJR's Debra Barnes shares an emotional part of her family's history.**

Of the many 80<sup>th</sup> anniversaries commemorated this year, that of Convoy 77 – marked by the reading of the names at Le Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris (see [www.convoy77.com](http://www.convoy77.com)) – resonated most with me. Convoy 77 left Drancy, the internment camp in Paris, for Auschwitz on 31 July

1944, just three weeks before the allies liberated the city.

Convoy 77 was the last to make this horrific journey. Crammed into the cattle trucks were 986 men and women and 324 children. The children were almost all orphans whose parents had been deported in the round-ups of 1942, taken from the UGIF (Union Générale des Israélites de France) orphanages in and around Paris.

The Nazis knew their occupation would soon end. Under cover of the instability in the city due to the advancement of the allies, Alois Brunner, camp commandant of Drancy, continued his murderous frenzy. He

was eagerly aided by the French authorities, desperate to get rid of the evidence which proved how they had collaborated with the Nazis, i.e. the orphans left behind after their parents had been deported.

The orphans were sent straight to the gas chambers on arrival at Auschwitz. My mother Paulette's twin sister Annette, aged six, and their youngest brother Nathan, aged 12 were among them. They had been arrested on 22 July from the UGIF orphanage in Louveciennes, an idyllic suburb outside Paris so beautiful it appears in over 120 paintings by artists including Renoir, Monet, Pissarro and Sisley.



The Beetroot Seller



Worried



Rabbi and Scholars: Yeshiva

pervaded much of my life. It is always about being stuck with feelings and thoughts that make me panic in a place from which there is no escape, or at least no perceived escape.

My father told me about studying art in the Warsaw Academy before the war. Antisemitism was rife: because he was a Jew he had to stand for the duration of the classes – was this to induce shame and humiliation, or to make the Jewish students feel ever so grateful for the privilege of being allowed to study amongst the upright Polish citizens? I suspect both were true. My jaw dropped when I first heard this as a young teenager, and I had such a strong sense of outrage which has honestly never really left me. But along with this was a much harder feeling to manage, and that is one of shame, toxic shame. It is such a painful thing to feel that I am sure we mostly suppress it and put it away somewhere deep within our psyche. But it has a habit of being aroused when anything with a mere tang of it presents in our everyday lives in the here and now. And then, wham, we are transported into an archaic world of shame, humiliation, feeling

exposed, marginalised and vulnerable.

The overwhelming grief and fear that my father must have felt in 1939, became severe separation anxiety for both him and me post-War. Claustrophobia became the hallmark of dreadful anxiety I felt at school and have continued to feel most of my adult life. A sense of shame and fear of being exposed and humiliated because of my Jewish identity also became the legacy of internalising such feelings that both my parents would have had. Because my mother also told me stories of incarceration in the Ghetto, and of standing on the selection ramp at Auschwitz whilst Joseph Mengele pointed his thumb for her to walk to the barracks and then pointed his thumb in the opposite direction for her mother, my grandmother, to walk to the gas chamber. She told me about the hermetically sealed train to Auschwitz, rammed and with no escape, and the starvation and rampant disease in Belsen, and her contracting typhus fever and believing she would die at the age of sixteen. And then after the war the realisation that both her parents, her older

brother, and almost her entire extended family had been murdered.

I mention this as well to convey how over-determined my incorporation of PTSD-type anxieties, alongside intermittent depressive feelings were. If I hadn't heard it from my mother's lips or read her it in her writings, then I saw it etched in the faces of my Father's paintings.

BUT, and it's a capital BUT, it isn't the whole story. My father's beautiful, warm, if sometimes difficult, paintings, depicting Polish Jewish Shtetl life, are his testimony to the fact that this rich and diverse way of life truly lived and breathed and it bequeaths to us all a sense of rootedness and identity that pulsates with love if we only take the time to stand still and really look at it.

Hence the exhibition. Please come. It tells the story of a man and his art but speaks to us all.

**The exhibition will run from 18 November until 8 December at Oaks Lane Synagogue, Newbury Park, Ilford IG2 7PL**

One of the older orphans, Denise Holstein, looked after the youngest children. Denise was selected for slave labour at Auschwitz and managed to survive. Later she told her story in a book. On the front cover of her book is a photograph of her with the children on the steps of the orphanage, and in the book she writes that all the children in the photograph were murdered at Auschwitz. Yet, there on the back step, in the middle, with the shaved head, was my mother, with Annette on her left.

Denise had no idea my mother was alive. She had forgotten that, days before the orphanage raids, my mother got sick with measles and was sent to the hospital in

Saint-Germain-en-Laye. When the doctors heard of the raids, they handed her over to nuns in a convent where she stayed hidden for one year.

My mother died in 2010 but not before she reunited with Denise after 62 years apart. Denise survived in the South of France – I visited her this summer but she is very frail and her memory has gone. If you speak French, you can read her book *Je ne vous oublierai jamais, mes enfants d'Auschwitz*; if not you can read my own book, *The Young Survivors*.



Denise Holstein (R) at the orphanage in Louveciennes with her nine charges shortly before they were deported. In the middle of the back row are Annette and Paulette



David Magen on the Isle of Man



One of Erich's caricatures



Erich Oppenheimer, David's grandfather

# From man to Man

In recent years Israel-based David Magen has spent a significant amount of time researching his family history, including a visit to the Isle of Man earlier this year.

My grandfather Erich Oppenheimer, a highly respected optician at the height of his career, managed to escape from Vienna in April 1939, arriving in South Wales where eventually he would be reunited with my mother, the late Dorothy Fleming, who he had sent on the Kindertransport a few months earlier.

In June 1940, he dropped in at home to collect some tools he needed for work. To his misfortune, police arrested him and sent him to the Isle of Man where he spent almost a year interned at Central Promenade and Onchan Camps.

History was never my favourite subject at school (that's an understatement), but curiosity about my grandfather's internment led me to some interesting discoveries.

Three people played important roles in my search for information: Rachel Pistol, historian and author, Eva Fox Gal, daughter of Hans Gal (a distant relation, also interned on the IOM) and descendants of Commandant Major Cecil Francis, commander of Central Camp.

Letters written by Erich to the family were censored, so they contained no real insight into the daily routine in the camps. However, one sentence in one letter motivated me to delve further into this period of internment.

Erich wrote: "Commandant asked me to draw a caricature in his book as a keepsake".

While he was a professional optician, my grandfather's hobby was to draw caricatures, many of which have survived. Using a small amount of my Israeli 'persistence' I managed to obtain some materials that Major Francis had left to his descendants. You can imagine how thrilled I was to find the caricature, signed by Erich. Another document showed 34 signatures of 'Housefathers' whose responsibility was to represent the occupants of their houses in the chain of command. Here I found Erich was Housefather of House #2.

On a recent visit to the U.K. I incorporated a short excursion to the Isle of Man, where I spent most of my time in the library

and archive. The staff were extremely gracious in preparing materials I had requested in advance, including original plans of the camps and daily orders from the government and the military, all very interesting.

I stayed overnight in a house which was part of Central Camp in 1940. I walked over to Onchan and tried to envisage what my grandfather would have been thinking in those long months. There is a huge contrast between the natural beauty of Douglas, its beach, the promenade, the fresh air and the seagulls. Surrounded by barbed wire, with sentries armed with rifles and bayonets, crowded accommodation, but worst of all, not knowing when this ordeal would end, and thinking of my grandmother, alone in London during the blitz, and my mother (then age 12) and aunt (then age 6) evacuated with their schools to places in the countryside.

For me this was a meaningful experience, which became a unique opportunity for me to be close in spirit with my grandfather Erich who sadly died in January 1950, before I was born.

# “WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR VISIT?”

Susan Hamlyn uses artefacts brought here by her refugee grandparents to shed a light on life in Belgium at the start of WW1.

“What is the purpose of your visit?” asked the man at Eurostar Passport Control. I hesitated. “Visiting family?” he suggested, helpfully, “holiday?”

My purpose was hard to classify. My small suitcase, carefully lined with a spare shirt, underwear, nightdress and toothbrush, contained two plastic folders. Each folder held 99 postcards. I was taking them to a place I didn't know, for a reason that I was sure the Passport Officer did not have time to listen to.

The place was Kontich – a small town c.30 minutes from Antwerp, Belgium. 110 years ago, at the outbreak of WW1, my grandfather, a forty-year-old lawyer from Bielefeld, Germany, was drafted into the Landsturm branch of the German army and sent to Belgium as part of the occupying force. The Landsturm was composed of the youngest recruits and those between 40-45. My grandfather Willy Katzenstein's heart was in philosophy, poetry and in the climbing of lofty mountains but, as the only son of devoted parents, he had decided on a legal career.

As it happens, he loved Belgium, having spent many holidays there. He kept a diary throughout the War – 292 typed pages that I discovered in a cupboard with other documentation shortly before my 97-year-old mother's death in 2022.

Willy records a pretty comfortable life – for the German officers that was – though, as the war goes on, he also describes the increasing deprivation of his Belgian neighbours, the occasional misdemeanour of one of his fellow soldiers which he deplores – the desecration of a cemetery, the seduction of a local girl, even insolence to a baker or postmaster. He is a civilised man and spends his leave going to the opera in Antwerp or visiting churches, lamenting when one is destroyed by a

Willy Katzenstein (6th from left) and his company in Kontich during WW1



bomb – whoever dropped it.

His longest billet is in Kontich – then a small place, largely agricultural but with a few grand houses, one of which is appropriated for him when he is made *Ortskommandant*. Willy flatters himself that he gets on well with the locals despite confiscating their cooking pots and agricultural implements to help with the making of munitions. Indeed, as an individual he was clearly not disliked. One episode sees the German army rounding up 48 local “spies” whom they accuse of assisting the enemy – covertly returning captured soldiers to their own units etc. Willy, as a lawyer, is appointed to act as defence counsel in their trial – though his commanding officer reminds him beforehand that, while he must be a conscientious advocate, he is foremost a German officer. The ringleaders were sentenced to death by firing squad but Willy puts in a plea for clemency for one girl called Margriet Ballegeer, whose father is the local police chief with whom he is on friendly terms. Margriet's sentence is commuted to hard labour.

Throughout the war Willy sends postcards home to his parents. He does this twice weekly until he leaves Kontich in March 1918. The postcards depict his mounted, moustached and helmeted colleagues in their heavily braided uniforms, bombed buildings, assemblies of soldiers or farm workers, streets, churches, girls. All have indecipherable messages on the back, doubtless appropriately anodyne but invaluable to Belgian historians of the war.

After Kontich, Willy is sent, for the first time, to the front where so many soldiers have fallen that the oldest and youngest are now thrown into the immediate brutality of the war. Diary entries from now on are sparse and brief but factually record several near-death escapes and the killing, at his side, of compatriots. Whenever possible, he still pens a postcard home.

The postcards were carefully numbered and clearly treasured by his parents. There must have been nearly 500 of them. They were also treasured long after their deaths to the extent that when Willy and my grandmother – he finally married at the age of 47 – frantically packed up what belongings they could in May 1939 and fled Germany in the face of Nazi persecution – 198 of the postcards were among the scant possessions they brought to this country. Willy was Jewish though he does not once refer to this in his diary of WW1 during which he received the Iron Cross. His Germanness was core to his character and the Nazi desecration of German culture and law is what he most loathed about them.

The Passport Officer was still waiting.

“The purpose of your visit?” he asked again.

“I am making a donation to a museum,” I explained. “Some postcards.” He raised an eyebrow, smiled at me kindly and let me through.

# THE SEARCH NOTICE

This moving poem was written by **Ben Barkow**, former director of the Wiener Holocaust Library, in memory of Ludwig and Anna Spiro.

## THE SEARCH NOTICE

*I visited where Enni Zilke went  
in 1954 July.*

*I saw what she had placed –  
a notice – almost a memorial  
at least that's how I see it now.*

*She saw it differently –  
a question with a hope however faint,  
that someone would come forward  
with an answer or a clue.*

*I assume that no-one did but can't be  
sure.*

*Perhaps they did reply and satisfied  
her curiosity. Perhaps  
she wept over the news and  
felt her Sündenherz torn,  
knirscht in zwei.*

*It was parochial and heartbreaking  
the little notice in the journal,  
underneath the heading  
Missing Persons Enquiries for AJR.*

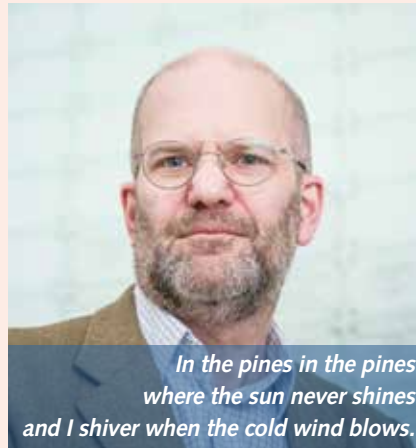
*One of only three –  
ten words searching for a life  
survival or obituary –  
underneath a dating ad – an engineer  
seeking sincerity and marriage.*

*My guess is that no answer came  
and Enni Zilke in her room  
in Hamburg sat alone or walked alone  
beside the Elbe  
or the Alster in the sunshine or the rain  
–*

*wondering where Hilde was  
her friend from college or her colleague  
from that teaching post  
in Berlin-Friedenau –  
what had become of her?*

*She didn't know  
but could have known and should have  
known  
enough to picture it –  
how Hilde beaten bleeding weak-kneed  
weeping terrified  
and with no friend to help her  
walked and stumbled  
fell.*

*In the pines where the sun never shines.*



*In the pines in the pines  
where the sun never shines  
and I shiver when the cold wind blows.*

**BEN BARKOW CBE** was born in Berlin but grew up and was educated in London. He worked for 30 years at the Wiener Holocaust Library, 20 of them as its director.

Today he chairs the Academic Advisory Board of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, which is establishing the UK's national Holocaust Memorial next to the Houses of Parliament.

He is former Chair and now Trustee of the Holocaust Centre North, as well as the Ernest Hecht Charitable Foundation. In 2022 he was awarded the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for all his work for The Wiener Holocaust Library. This award is the highest tribute the Federal Republic of Germany can pay to individuals to services to the nation. In 2023, he was awarded the CBE for services to Holocaust commemoration and education.

He has published a number of books relating to the Holocaust. His latest book, due to be published this autumn, is a collection of poems he has written about his family's experiences during the Holocaust, especially his great aunt Hilde and his grandfather.

**On 12 November at 4pm the AJR is hosting a Zoom session where we will hear Ben talk about his family's Holocaust experience and read some of his poems. Please contact [naomi@ajr.org.uk](mailto:naomi@ajr.org.uk)**



## KRISTALLNACHT SERVICE 2024

**THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER at 2pm  
BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE**

If you prefer to watch the event live through the internet, rather than attend in person, simply type

[www.synagogue.org.uk/services/live/](http://www.synagogue.org.uk/services/live/) into your browser at 2pm on the day

IN PERSON [susan@ajr.org.uk](mailto:susan@ajr.org.uk)



## KINDER EVENTS – for all Kinder and their descendants

### LUNCH

**THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER  
at 12PM**

**Calling all Kinder, 1g, 2g, 3g and 4g**

All Kinder and descendants are invited to join us for an informal lunch on Thursday 31 October at 12pm at a North London venue, details to be advised upon booking.

We will be joined by a speaker from **New Citizens Gateway**, a charity which works to help improve the the physical, social and mental well-being of refugees and asylum seekers.

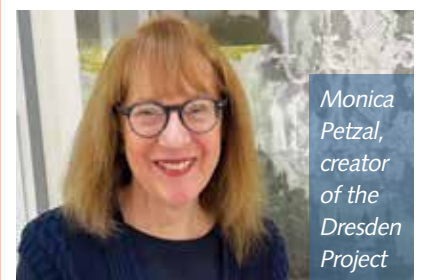
[susan@ajr.org.uk](mailto:susan@ajr.org.uk)



### AJR SPECIAL EVENT

## INDELIBLE MARKS: The Dresden Project

**IN SAXMUNDHAM, SUFFOLK  
MONDAY 28 OCTOBER 2024**



*Monica  
Petzal,  
creator  
of the  
Dresden  
Project*

*Complimentary lunch and transfers  
from Saxmundham railway station*

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

# Introducing our new Trustees

The AJR is proposing to elect two new Trustees at the Annual Election meeting in December. The Board of Trustees has overall fiduciary and strategic responsibilities for the charity, including the disbursement of financial support, and for managing funds to benefit its membership.

## ANTHONY HELLMAN

Anthony is the son of the late Gerald and Marianne Hellman, both having contributed to AJR life since arriving in the UK. Gerald arrived from Nuremberg with his parents and brother in April 1933, his father escaping arrest by the Nazis and transportation to Dachau. Marianne came from Teplice in the Czech Republic, arriving via the Hook of Holland with her parents and brother in March 1939.

Anthony's paternal grandmother spent her final years in the AJR Heinrich Stahl House in Hampstead and his uncle was a resident in the AJR Cleve Road flats and Day Centre. Anthony is immensely thankful to the AJR for supporting his family and is returning to lend his support as a trustee, being a member of the Investment and other committees.

Anthony's career started on the London Metal Exchange, progressing to foreign exchange advice with Chase Manhattan Bank. This was followed by joining a start-up stockbroker where, as a partner, he headed the International fixed income business. The firm became the UK's leading integrated wealth management and professional services business.

Anthony retired in 2018 and now very much enjoys following his passion for art, both collecting emerging artists as well as getting his hands into plaster to



create his own sculptures. His wife Amanda volunteers for Jewish Care and enjoys their local AJR Enfield group where new friends are made.

Anthony looks forward to continuing his family's association with AJR activities, helping to maintain its history and its support for Holocaust survivors and refugees and their families.

## JANET LEW

Janet Lew is a writer and the daughter of two refugees. Robert Evans (née Eisenstein) escaped from Vienna in 1939 and later ran Dukes restaurant and Hill House Hampstead with two fellow refugees he had met in the Royal Pioneer Corps. Her mother, Eva Evans, worked for Sir Ernst Gombrich, the well-known Austrian refugee art historian, and later gained an MBE for her work in European Studies.

Janet began her working life developing interactive training programmes for the BBC, the Post Office, Shell and several banks. As a writer, she produced and co-wrote *Kinder*, a fictional story about a Kindertransport boy now in his eighties who returns to the home where he was first fostered when he came to England. *Kinder* has won awards internationally, was



screened last year by the AJR and is now used to commemorate HMD.

Janet has edited a short film about her mother based on her AJR Refugee Voices interview and is now developing a fictional TV series called *Citizen of Nowhere* drawing on her grandmother's memoirs. Recently, she featured in two German documentaries about applying for German Citizenship and about the loss of the family's property confiscated from Hamburg Port in 1939.

AJR has always been part of the fabric of her life from *AJR Journals* scattered over the coffee table to attending AJR forums as well as an organised trip to Berlin where she filmed and interviewed her mother. Later she was inspired to write a chapter for a book called *The Journey Home: Emerging out of the Shadow of the Past*, published by Peter Lang. Janet looks forward to supporting AJR with both the first generation (her own mother is 100 years old) and the next generations using her creative and educational background.

**The AJR's Annual Election meeting will take place on Wednesday 11 December at 3pm. To attend please contact the office.**

# REVIEW

## THE BUND: A GRAPHIC HISTORY OF JEWISH LABOUR RESISTANCE

Written by Sharon Rudahl, Edited by Paul Buhle, Art by Michael Kluckner  
Between The Lines

This intriguing graphic history about the Bund Jewish Socialist movement founded in Vilnius, Lithuania in 1897 brings to life the struggles of workers and intellectuals against oppression and to create a better world

*The Bund* explains the oppressive origins of Jewish resistance in Ukraine, Poland and the "Pale of Settlement" in Tsarist Russia. It is prefaced by a foreword by David Rosenberg whose grandparents were born in that area who describes Bundists he knew, survivors from Auschwitz, Belsen and Theresienstadt as well as the Warsaw Ghetto. As he explains: "Unusually for a serious and dedicated revolutionary movement they put great stress on culture". Yiddish ideas were paramount but they also embraced the world that others had created including art, music, literature and education.

Endorsing Yiddish as "The Mother Tongue", Bundists adopted this Jewish language in literature, flyers and alerts.

Industrialisation proliferated and class divisions hardened. The twentieth century saw them involved in or witnessing great conflicts. The movement had its high water mark before the disastrous 1905 Russo-Japanese War and failed revolution. Then in 1917 came the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on March 15, and Lenin's return from exile in Switzerland.

Although following repression the Bund soon ceased to exist as a political party in the Soviet Union, other Bunds in Eastern Europe resisted increasing antisemitism. As Nazism tightened its grip the Bund's experience in underground work was invaluable. Couriers helped Jews escape and relayed messages, money and forged papers as well as smuggling arms to resistance workers. The Polish Bund called a general strike against segregation and persecution and boosted schools and healthcare for Jewish children. Members rebelled against Nazism and led underground movements bringing relief to the Warsaw Ghetto.

Everything in this short graphic novel is explained very simply and succinctly with the most beautiful but tasteful and subtle art work. It is written with a refreshingly light touch but with a determination to get the message across. Despite dramatic experiences including terror, bombings assassinations and revolutions, the Bundists remained optimistic never losing the ability

to think they could change the world. Invariably they experienced great hardship but their courage and determination remained undimmed.

The work concludes with portraits of influential Bundists including Moishe (Michael) Lewis who chose the Bund over Zionism and fled to Canada in 1921. He led the Jewish Labour Committee especially prominent in refugee work following World War II. Activist Charney Vladek fled to USA choosing journalism and newspaper management in the Yiddish world. His distinguished career included being alderman in New York where "Vladek Park", Manhattan is named after him. Born in Russia Pesach (Paul) Novick was a Bund member and Marxist at 15 and moved to Warsaw but fled to USA to escape the Russian draft. He too forged a journalism career editing the Yiddish communist newspaper *Morgyn Frayhayt*. Book editor Paul Buhle met him before he died in 1989. Novick wrote a poetic account reflecting back in old age concluding he would have no difficulty choosing the Bund over Communists. Buhle said: "Pesach was clever and charming – he wrote wonderful Yiddish prose... – he might possibly have said this with a twinkle in his eye. We will never know".

Janet Weston

## REMARKABLE RITA REACHES 100

AJR member Rita Abrams celebrated her centenary on 20 August.

Rita was born in Vienna to parents Gregor and Clara Posniansky, who realised on Kristallnacht that leaving Austria was the only option. Within weeks they had arranged for Rita to leave on a Kindertransport via Holland, crossing the North Sea to Harwich and to safety.

Arriving at Lime Street station to a busy, smoky and bustling pre-war Liverpool, Rita was picked from a line-up of other refugee children by Reina Abrams, and taken to live with her family in Salisbury Road, Liverpool.

There, Rita met Sam Abrams, love blossomed, and they were married on

Rita's 16th birthday, 20 August 1940. They later had two children of their own, Jennifer and Gregory. Future generations flourished and Rita now has seven grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren, never forgetting a birthday or a present!

Rita is truly remarkable, a devoted mum and grandma and an independent spirit. She still completes the *Telegraph* crossword daily, is an active bridge player, and attends community social functions, with a passion for the Philharmonic, the theatre and cinema. Having trained in legal accountancy and IT, her work as a senior cashier and bookkeeper in the family's legal firm has kept her sharp as a needle, in fact she didn't retire until she was 97!



AJR Social Worker Alison Worthington is honoured to work with Rita and describes her as 'Not one for looking back, but forward, always'. She leads her AJR colleagues in wishing Rita a continued life filled with love, good health and happiness.

# A LEGACY WHICH AFFECTED ALL OUR LIVES

**Naomi Anne Shmuel describes how writing about her mother's heritage has been a harrowing journey of redefinition.**

The publication of *my* own book about my mother, the author and poet Karen Gershon, coincided with a lecture visit to Germany following the release of a new German edition of *her* book.

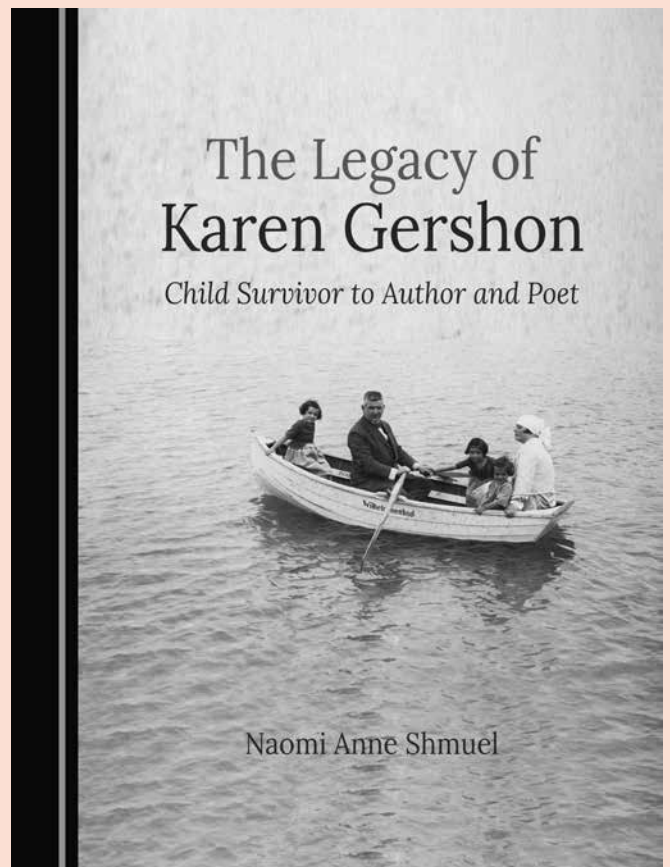
Standing in front of the train station in Bielefeld – from which my mother was exiled to England as a teenager on the Kindertransport and her parents subsequently transported to their death – I felt an eerie connection to the place that she always held close to her heart despite everything.

Opposite me was the Bielefelder Hof, that grand hotel my mother had stayed in all those years ago – 1963 – when she returned to Germany for the first time and started to deal with the loss of her parents and her childhood, unfolding a suppressed grief deeply entwined in the Jewish identity she had successfully repressed for such a long time.

That was a year after I was born, the first of many times she was to leave us (her four children) to process her grief and rediscover her roots. Now, 61 years later, I stayed in the same hotel, accompanied by my sister Stella, my relentless (if at times reticent) partner in uncovering and preserving our mother's story. Walking towards it we were drawn towards a plaque commemorating all those deported from the station to be killed during the Holocaust, including our grandparents, Paul and Selma Loewenthal.

When mother's book *We Came As Children* was first published in 1966 by Gollancz, the public attention it attracted was matched by an equally potent family upheaval as we children became aware of our Jewish roots. As I write in my own book:

**"Karen was becoming the voice of her generation, invited to give interviews on national radio and television, featured in both national and local newspapers. Stella (by now eleven and a half) walked the streets of Ilminster and felt people turning their heads, whispering, pointing her out as the daughter of that German refugee who wrote those books. The publicity for *We Came As Children* brought strangers to their home, reporters wishing to interview Karen and refugees she had interviewed for the book. Lingered in the hallway Stella listened to Karen recounting her story, hearing it for the first time. There were snippets of information she now tried to piece together, still refraining from asking questions, sensing intuitively the pain stirred by all this probing into her mother's past. [...] And back home, in Ilminster, Chris, mellowed by maturity, sat watching the screen and began to realize with a flutter of the heart a fragment of what it meant to be Jewish."**



With her renewed Jewish awareness Karen Gershon participated in a delegation of British authors invited by President Shazar to visit Israel. It was a journey which would change lives:

**"The August heat, heavy and overwhelming, enveloped her as she got off the plane at Ben Gurion airport, bursting with the joy of homecoming and anticipation. The President's emissary collected the group and led them to a waiting minibus, welcoming them in an endearing Israeli accent and explaining the view on the way to Jerusalem. Karen looked at the abandoned army vehicles left as testament to the armed struggle to free the city and felt her heart pounding.**

The rest is history: we first went to Israel in 1967 and emigrated in 1968. This was the period most difficult for me to write about, and my mother – a great writer – never wrote about it herself. By the end of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 most of us were back in England.

Today three out of our four siblings live in Israel, while in a suburb of Bielefeld (Jöllenbeck) they are building the Karen Gershon Platz in our mother's memory.

Gershon's legacy relates to universal human themes: being a refugee, the never-ending search for a viable identity and sense of home, as well as the inevitable effects of inherited trauma and rootlessness on the next generation. Writing her story has been a harrowing journey of redefinition.

**Naomi Anne Shmuel's book *The Legacy of Karen Gershon: Child Survivor to Author and Poet* was published in June 2024 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.**

# Walking in their footsteps

**Tom Horvath Neumann**

**retraces the courageous 130km journey that Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler made to warn the world what was happening at Auschwitz-Birkenau.**

As a Hungarian Jew, the names Vrba and Wetzler resonate deeply with me. Their courageous escape in April 1944 and subsequent report, known as the Auschwitz Protocols, are ingrained in our collective memory as a beacon of defiance and a desperate plea for action. This year marks the 80th anniversary of their monumental escape, and I had the privilege of participating in the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial Walk, an initiative to honour their legacy and educate about antisemitism.

The original journey to Žilina, Slovakia, was a harrowing 17-day ordeal, undertaken without maps, compasses, provisions, or aid, walking by night to avoid being seen under the constant threat of capture by Nazi forces. In stark contrast, our group of 40 walkers, led by a dedicated team of guides and organisers, navigated the same route in six days, equipped with modern comforts and support.

Despite these advantages, the walk was still challenging, offering a humbling glimpse into the unimaginable hardship Vrba and Wetzler endured. It was impossible not to reflect on their traumatised and malnourished state after nearly two years in Auschwitz, making their journey even more remarkable. Only a very few Jewish prisoners managed to escape Auschwitz, due to the high level of security, the geographical isolation of the camp, the severe consequences for escapees and their fellow prisoners, and the sheer difficulty of surviving after an escape in a hostile and heavily controlled environment.

The Memorial Walk was initiated 10 years ago by the family of Rudolf Vrba and organised by the International

Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ). What was particularly powerful – and pleasantly surprising – was that the drive to address antisemitism and lead this memorial walk was predominantly championed by ordinary, non-Jewish Czech and Slovak citizens. This commitment, particularly from those outside the Jewish community, was a testament to the universal importance of remembering and combating antisemitism.

There were six international attendees, two from Holland, two from the UK and two from New York – the four from the UK and US were the sole Jewish participants. The attendees were from various walks of professional life and this diversity underscored a collective responsibility to understand and address the historical and contemporary challenges of antisemitism.

The walk leader was Radek Hejret, who provided a comprehensive understanding of the atrocities faced by Jews during WW2. Another key figure was Michal Vašečka, a Slovak sociologist and public intellectual, who provided a detailed historical context regarding Slovakia's role during the war and the anti-Jewish laws enacted.

A particularly touching story came from Lukáš Kunca, a participant from Košice, Slovakia, who took it upon himself to clean an overgrown Jewish cemetery in his hometown. His act, driven purely by a sense of respect and dignity for the deceased, was a powerful example of how non-Jews can play a vital role in preserving Jewish heritage and combating antisemitism.

As we walked, I was deeply moved by the sincere and active participation of these Czech and Slovak citizens. Their leadership in addressing antisemitism was not only unexpected but also profoundly impactful. The discussions ranged from historical perspectives to contemporary challenges, illustrating a collective commitment to fight hatred and prejudice, transcending religious and cultural boundaries.

Participating in the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial Walk was not just a commemoration; it was an inspiring journey of learning and reflection. The involvement of non-Jewish participants in raising awareness about antisemitism and their dedication to preserving this painful history was truly uplifting. Initiatives like these, led by individuals from diverse backgrounds, are crucial in ensuring that the lessons of the past are not forgotten and that we continue to strive for a world free from hate.

On a personal reflection, Vrba and Wetzler's escape and report was intended to warn Hungarian Jewry of the existential threat. What followed was tragic reality and remains hugely controversial: could more have been done to save Hungarian Jewish lives? Renowned historian Yehuda Bauer said of the Vrba Wetzler report that without belief in information, there is no knowledge; and without knowledge, there is no action. This insight is a poignant reflection on the events that unfolded after the Auschwitz Protocols were released.

In the footsteps of Vrba and Wetzler, we walked not only to honour their memory but also to reaffirm our collective commitment to confronting antisemitism. Their bravery in 1944 continues to serve as a timeless reminder that even in the darkest times, the pursuit of truth and justice can illuminate the path forward.

The P (for Poland) on the border stone fails to mask the D (for Deutschland) that was there originally.



# OBITUARY

**Dr Charlotte BUSHELL FRCP**

Born: 7 April 1924, Bratislava

Died: 7 June 2024, London



**Charlotte, the middle child of Adolf and Alzbeta Feldmann, had an older brother, Paul, and a younger sister, Trude, who still lives in Leeds (Gertrude Silman MBE), who has become a passionate supporter of Holocaust education, particularly in the north of England.**

Their father lost his bank in the 1929 Wall Street Crash and this made family circumstances difficult, although grandparents were on hand to help. As a child Charlotte loved skating, skiing, tennis and swimming. Meanwhile holidays were spent either with family in nearby Vienna or on her paternal grandparents' farm near Piestany, where the large family would gather in the summer. Skiing remained her lifelong passion, and she was proud to still be off-piste ski-ing until her mid-80s. She also enjoyed opera, a passion passed on to her by her mother.

At the end of 1938 after the German occupation, Charlotte was sent to England to learn English, supposedly for one year. She travelled by train and ship over New Year's Eve, wearing her

mother's diamond rings with the stones turned inwards. Her siblings followed in 1939 and, though they spent the war separately, always remained close. Charlotte never saw her parents again. Adolf died in Auschwitz in 1942 and in 1944, Alzbeta (despite converting and marrying a non-Jew) was detained in Sered, a labour camp outside Bratislava (now the site of the Slovak Holocaust Museum). Perhaps she was murdered on one of the death marches in 1945 as her final resting place remains a mystery.

Charlotte, through a family connection, was given a wonderful home with Hymie and Phoebe Leon and their two daughters, Evelyn and Annette, in Kew. Hymie was Mayor of Richmond on three occasions. Even as a youngster Charlotte was very driven and, from knowing no English, she excelled in her school certs and was accepted at Leeds University medical school on a Jewish quota, qualifying in the same year that the NHS was founded. She became a renowned rheumatologist and was latterly elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, at a time when few women received that honour. During her distinguished career, including at the Hammersmith and Cromwell hospitals, one of the slightly more unusual moments was when she was interviewed on television news to offer an opinion on whether the

Queen had arthritis in her fingers or not.

Charlotte married Julius Silman from a distinguished Zionist family in Leeds in 1948 and they brought up their three children in a large family home near Wimbledon Village. She loved to be beautifully dressed and have a stylish home and to host elegant parties (through Julius's work as a city lawyer they knew many actors and TV people), but in 1971 they divorced. They are featured in a book by Drusilla Beyfus, entitled *The English Marriage*, which looked at various marital case histories.

In 1975 Charlotte married Robert Bushell, director of a newspaper company, and they had a happy family life until Robert's death in 2009 Robert took early retirement to look after their home and garden so that Charlotte could remain in private practice until her mid-70s. She could not have found a better partner and he made her happy.

Charlotte is survived by three children and four grandchildren. Earlier this year she celebrated her hundredth birthday, and probably the last photos of Charlotte were taken then, showing her supping champagne.

**Rachel Silman**

## A VERY PERSONAL WALK

**A few weeks after Tom had finished his walk, the AJR's Dr Bea Lewkowicz participated in a second Vrba-Wetzler memorial walk, together with her husband and two of their children.**

One highlight was reaching the Polish/Slovak border where small grey stones are placed between the villages of Zwardoní and Skalité. The letters P on one side of their stones and S on the other fail to mask the faint D – for Deutschland –

there originally, which Vrba and Wetzler described passing during their escape.

Bea grew up with Vrba and Wetzler's stories as Alfred Wetzler married her mother's cousin Eta after WW2. She says that the experience of being in the very places they describe was very powerful and that she "had underestimated the physical effort it must have taken for the two men to walk from Auschwitz to Skalité and stay undetected."

Bea also got an emotional surprise during the final element of the memorial, the 10th anniversary event in Žilina featuring a film on Alfred Wetzler by Robert Kirchhoff, in which Bea's own dear late mother appeared on the big screen, talking in 2017 about her encounter with Vrba and Wetzler.

You can read Bea's full blog about her visit on [www.ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk/post/in-the-footsteps-of-vrba-wetzler](http://www.ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk/post/in-the-footsteps-of-vrba-wetzler)

## IN PERSON EVENTS

DATE	TIME	GROUP	CO-ORDINATOR
Wednesday 9 October	12.30pm	Muswell Hill	Ros Hart
Thursday 10 October	11.00am	South London	Karen Diamond
Monday 14 October	12.30pm	Kingston	Ros Hart
Tuesday 15 October	12 noon	Cambridge	Karen Diamond
Monday 21 October	12.30pm	Edgware	Ros Hart
Monday 28 October	12.30pm	Bristol	Ros Hart
Monday 28 October	12.00pm	Norfolk/Suffolk	Karen Diamond
Tuesday 29 October	Tbc	Liverpool	Michal Mocton
Tuesday 29 October	2.00pm	Pinner	Karen Diamond
Wednesday 30 October	2.00pm	Edinburgh	Agnes Isaacs
Wednesday 30 October	12.30pm	York	Michal Mocton
Thursday 31 October	11.00am	Glasgow Coffee and Cake	Agnes Isaacs
Thursday 31 October	12.00pm	Kinder Lunch	Susan Harrod

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## ZOOMS AHEAD

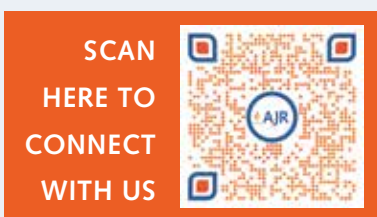
Details of all meetings and the links to join will appear in the e-newsletter each Monday.

Monday 7 October @ 4pm	<b>Quiz Time</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/84242563596">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/84242563596</a>	Meeting ID 842 4256 3596
Wednesday 9 October @ 4pm	<b>Lynne Bradley – The Jews who wrote the Musicals</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87242404924">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87242404924</a>	Meeting ID: 8724 240 4924
Monday 14 October @ 4pm	<b>Author Walter Sneader – How were our medicines discovered?</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/83855505003">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/83855505003</a>	Meeting ID: 838 5550 5003
Tuesday 15 October @ 4pm	<b>David Allen – The Life of Dame Agatha Christie</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/84980817563">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/84980817563</a>	Meeting ID: 8498 0817 563
Wednesday 16 October @ 11am	<b>Book Discussion (no speaker) – Night Music by Jojo Moyes</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81966459247">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81966459247</a>	Meeting ID: 8196 645 9247
Monday 21 October @ 4pm	<b>The strange and chilling tale of Allach Porcelain, made in Dachau for the Nazi elite</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87031277327">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87031277327</a>	Meeting ID 870 3127 7327
Monday 28 October @ 4pm	<b>Elise Bath – The History of the Wiener Holocaust Library</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/86945959731">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/86945959731</a>	Meeting ID: 869 4595 9731
Tuesday 29 October @ 4pm	<b>Bob Sinfield – Rudy &amp; Hudy: Two 20th Century superstars</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87661821307">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87661821307</a>	Meeting ID: 8766 1821 307
Wednesday 30 October @ 4pm	<b>Dan Fox – The Beginning of the End: Jews, D-Day and the road to Victory</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/86855762040">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/86855762040</a>	Meeting ID: 8685 576 2040

## KEEP FIT WITH AJR

All AJR members & friends are invited to take part in these online exercise and dance classes throughout the coming month.

Every Mon @ 10.30am	<b>Get Fit where you Sit</b> (seated exercise)	<a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/85246889439">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/85246889439</a>	Meeting ID: 8524 688 9439
Every Tues @ 11.00am	<b>Shelley's Exercise class</b>	<a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/88466945622">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/88466945622</a>	Meeting ID: 884 6694 5622



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