



AJR JOURNAL

The Association of Jewish Refugees

Remembering & Rethinking Victory



A truck of VE Day revellers passing through the Strand, London, 8 May 1945

There is much to celebrate on 8 May, the 80th anniversary of VE Day. The Allied victory over Nazi Germany, of course. For European Jews, it marked the end of the Holocaust. For many Jewish refugees in Britain, it meant security at last in their new homes though there was a diversity of experiences.

But there is much to mourn also. The countless servicemen and women killed fighting for their countries, of course. The terrible number of civilians, among them six million Jews, killed by the Nazis and their collaborators. And for Jewish refugees, coming to terms with the loss of their homes and families, a whole world destroyed beyond repair.

Historians are still coming to terms with the story of the Second World War. One of the most interesting accounts of the war was written by the British historian, Norman Davies. Called *Europe at War, 1939-1945: No Simple Victory*, it was published in 2006, just after the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, and in part it drew on two extraordinary essays Davies wrote for *The*

New York Review of Books in the mid-1990s as the 50th anniversary of VE-Day approached, arguments he developed in his acclaimed book, *Europe: A History* (1996).

The essays in *The New York Review of Books* were not celebratory. They questioned much of the conventional wisdom about the war, part of a larger project in Davies's work to shift the way British and American readers and historians had been thinking about the war, to move the centre of gravity eastwards, to focus more on the Soviet Union and east Europe. Years on, with the opening of Soviet, Ukrainian and east European archives, a new generation of historians have followed Davies and re-written the war.

Continued on page 2

REPORTING IN

As our annual report demonstrates, last year was another full twelve months of the AJR doing what we do best: attending to the needs and interests of our unique community. You can read the full report on pages 9 – 14.

Looking ahead, our own team and those of many of our partners are fully committed to honouring the legacy created by the First Generation by sharing their stories and tackling antisemitism on their behalf.

In this vein the AJR has just sent its first-ever delegation on the March of the Living in Poland. We look forward to bringing you photos and a written account in our next issue.

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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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Remembering & Rethinking Victory (cont.)

Davies's book, *Europe at War*, is full of fascinating details. Early on, he mentions a ceremony in Poland in 2005 commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz and attended by Vladimir Putin among others. 'No speaker,' writes Davies, 'mentioned the fact that, as Auschwitz was liberated, other ex-Nazi concentration camps were being used by the Soviet security forces to incarcerate a new wave of captives... No one disturbed the peace by saying that the Nazi SS were not the only organisation to run concentration camps during the Second World War.' He meant Stalin's Terror, of course.

Davies goes on to mention the German League of Expellees which had already been campaigning for years for a memorial to the experience of 'well over 10 million civilians from Germany's eastern provinces [who] either fled before the threat of the Red Army's advances or were forcibly expelled thereafter.' This number does not include 'perhaps 2 million [who] perished.' In the *Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (1995), writes Davies, 'the editors were happy enough to accept an entry on the Gulag during the war, but not to place it within the main heading of 'Concentration Camps'. An entry on the Katyn Massacre, where 25,000 Polish officers were murdered, was also accepted, but not under the heading of 'War Crimes'. These are disturbing inconsistencies.

Davies then points out that El Alamein and Stalingrad are both remembered as Allied victories which contributed to the turning of the tide during the war. 'One of them knocked out six Axis divisions in a peripheral theatre of action; the other knocked out twenty Axis divisions in the central sector of the principal front.'

There is no doubt which was the greater turning-point.

Much of the revisionist thrust of Davies's book is about the Eastern Front. Some of this is about individual facts: 'over 90 per cent of the USSR... remained completely untouched throughout the war.' It was 'the western Soviet republics – not Russia – which were the scene of the heaviest fighting, and which bore the brunt of the German occupation.' It was as if western historians and politicians had forgotten about the existence of the Baltic Republics, Belarus and Ukraine until the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1991.

Belarus and western Ukraine, not Russia, 'saw both the most intense warfare and the worst civilian horrors: the deportations, the Soviet and German occupations, the scourging of the *Lebensraum* and the Holocaust. They were involved in the thick of the fighting from the very beginning in September 1939 right to the final phase in 1944-5...'

This is where two of the war's biggest campaigns – Barbarossa and Bagration – were fought. How many of us have even heard of the latter but 'perhaps a million lives' were lost there. As a result, 'Belarus lost a higher proportion of its civilian population than any other country in Europe.' Ukraine 'lost the highest absolute number.'

Then there were the prisoners of war. Almost two million Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner during Operation Barbarossa in 1941. Altogether, more than five million Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner by the Germans. Many were starved to death, often dying within months of capture. 'Of the 3.2 million Soviet soldiers captured during 1941-2,' writes Davies, '2.8 million did not live to see the summer.' Some 500,000 were sent to concentration camps, including Auschwitz. Then there were the Soviet troops murdered by the Soviet security police to make sure they didn't surrender: '198,000 were shot by the NKVD in 1941-42 alone.'

German casualties were also terrible. German military deaths on the Eastern Front accounted for about 80% of the total. Davies lists the number of deaths in individual battles and campaigns. The six with the highest number of deaths were all on the Eastern Front. Each of these saw between 325,00 (Kursk) and 1,582,000 (Barbarossa) killed.


Davies provides a list by country of military deaths during the Second World War. Nearly nine million Soviet troops lost their lives. More than four million German soldiers were killed. Perhaps surprisingly, the third largest number killed were Italians (400,000), followed by Romania (300,000). The British traditionally make fun of the French for surrendering so quickly but 200,000 British troops died compared to 250,000 French troops. There has been much talk recently about the number of American servicemen who lost their lives in Europe during the war. But the total number of American losses were 150,000, fewer than Hungary lost.

Then there are the terrible numbers of civilian deaths, especially from bombing. Many readers will recall the bombing raid on Coventry. Estimates vary from 380 to 568 killed. In Rotterdam some 900 people were killed in the infamous bombing raid in 1940. These figures are dwarfed by the numbers killed by German bombing raids on Warsaw (90,000 killed), or by Allied attacks on Dresden and Hamburg (each 40,000). Altogether, the Strategic Bombing Offensive 'killed perhaps half a million civilians' in Germany.

Other terrible statistics are the figures for rape. During the American invasion of Germany, according to Davies, 'the US Army's judge-advocate had to deal with 500 rape cases per week.' These figures are dwarfed by the attacks on German women by Soviet soldiers. In Berlin alone, in the last days of the war, Davies writes, '100,000 German women were raped.'

No wonder Davies called one of his articles about the Second World War, 'The Misunderstood War.' Part of the problem is that most historians see the war through the experience of their own country. Another crucial problem, especially until 1991, was that important archives remained closed for years, including, crucially, key collections in Moscow. Then there is the problem of languages. How many British or American historians could read documents in more than two or three western European languages? Only the new generations of English-speaking historians can read Polish, Russian and/or Ukrainian as well as German. As a result, thanks to historians like Norman Davies, Timothy Snyder (*Bloodlands*, 2010) and David Shneer (*Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, 2011), among many others, we are starting to see the history of the Second World War differently, shifting our focus from Dunkirk, El Alamein and D-Day to Belarus, Ukraine and the Eastern Front.

David Herman



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GREAT OUTREACH

As the days lengthen so too does the list of outings and events organised by the AJR's Outreach Team.

On 31 March we went to the Cambridge University Library for a talk about manuscripts from the **Cairo Genizah**.

This is a collection of some 400,000 fragments of Jewish manuscript and administrative documents that were found in the *genizah* (storeroom) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo, Egypt. The documents span the entire period of Middle Eastern, North African and Andalusian Jewish history between the 6th and 19th centuries, comprising the largest and most diverse collection of medieval manuscripts in the world.



Dr. Melonie Schmierer-Lee has spent 18 years piecing together fragments of old documents going back as far as the 6th century. AJR members very much enjoyed hearing about her work and inspecting some of the precious documents that provide such an insight into ancient Jewish life.

Just a few days later another group of AJR members met in the elegant foyer of **Bentley Priory Museum**. Tucked away behind a residential road in Stanmore, the very grand building was previously a private home, a hotel and a girls' school. The Dowager Queen Adelaide, the aunt of Queen Victoria, lived at Bentley Priory during the last year of her life, 1848-1849.

In July 1936, Bentley Priory became the HQ for the new RAF Fighter Command, under Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, whose leadership was critical to victory during the Battle of Britain.

We enjoyed a talk by our very knowledgeable tour guide, Erwin, followed by a delicious lunch in the sunny café,



Cairo Genizah



AJR members at Bentley Priory

overlooking the stunning gardens.

These one-off outings supplement a programme of regular regional meetings organised by the AJR's Outreach Team. For example, the **Enfield** group, formed in early 2023, has evolved into a bonded group of local people who didn't previously know one another, but now meet up regularly.

See the back page for details of upcoming events and contact details for AJR's Outreach team.

CALLING NORTHERN SOULS

Do you live north of Birmingham or in North Wales and have a parent or grandparent or family member who was a Holocaust survivor?

Do you want to preserve the memory of their persecution for future generations and to share their story and experiences with others? Do you have the time, tenacity, commitment and testimony to document and present your family story?

Northern Holocaust Education Group, NHEG, a growing charity, has a bank of accredited speakers who have already

been hosted over 360 times as keynote speakers, sharing their family stories with audiences – young and adult – of over 31,000. NHEG covers a large geographic area and is interested in recruiting people who want to become accredited speakers – especially if you live outside the main Jewish areas.

NHEG works closely with the Holocaust education charity Generation 2 Generation, G2G. Both charities provide speakers with advice from professional Holocaust historians and help with the tricky technicalities of producing a professional PowerPoint that will enhance your talk and engage your audience.



NHEG talks typically last about 35 minutes. Although the majority of our work is in schools we also provide personal Holocaust testimonies to other organisations, such as local authorities, Holocaust Memorial Day events, professional organisations, trade unions, football clubs, places of worship, and universities.

Please contact info@nheg.org.uk or judith@nheg.org.uk for an initial chat.

Judith Hayman

PLEASE WELCOME TOMMY

The AJR is delighted to introduce Tommy Gambrill, who is excited to join the team at the AJR as the Family Carer and Next Generation Support.

I am here to offer support to individuals and families who are navigating the complexities of caregiving, intergenerational trauma, and the lasting impact of their histories. I feel deeply honoured to be part of this organisation and to contribute to its mission of supporting the Jewish community.

In my position I work primarily with families and individuals, offering both emotional support and practical guidance to those who are caring for elderly relatives or managing the impact of trauma across generations. It is incredibly rewarding to be able to listen to their stories, understand their challenges, and walk alongside them as they navigate these difficult journeys. I believe that every family has its own unique dynamics, and my aim is to create a space where each person feels heard, valued, and supported in their own healing process.

Alongside my work at the AJR I am also a trainee therapist. This is a path I have chosen because of my passion for understanding human behaviour and supporting people through personal challenges. My training in

therapy has given me valuable tools and approaches to provide a compassionate, holistic approach to family care. I am currently deepening my skills to ensure I can offer the best possible support to clients and families, both emotionally and practically. I know the importance of integrating therapeutic practices when working with individuals and families, particularly when dealing with the deep emotional complexities that can come with caregiving and trauma.

My background in counselling has equipped me with the knowledge I need to support the people I work with, but it is my ongoing learning and commitment to growth that truly drives me. I'm continually expanding my knowledge, refining my skills, and striving to be the best therapist I can be. I believe that the key to effective support is not just understanding someone's struggles but also recognising their strengths and resilience. This is something I hope to bring to my work with families here at the AJR.

I am incredibly inspired by the resilience and strength that has been passed down through generations. It is my privilege to support the next generation in understanding and connecting with their heritage while navigating the challenges of their present-day lives. I am excited to work with individuals who are carrying the legacy of their families, helping them to honour their past while moving forward with hope and healing.



Tommy Gambrill

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with family, going to the gym and reading. I find great inspiration in learning more about Jewish history and the powerful stories of perseverance that continue to shape the Jewish identity today. It's an honour to contribute to the work of this organisation and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a supportive and inspiring team.

I look forward to getting to know everyone and to working together to make a positive impact on the lives of the families and individuals we serve. Thank you for welcoming me into this important work.

Tommy Gambrill
Tommy@ajr.org.uk

SCOTTISH GATHERING
WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025

Please join us for our Annual Scottish Regional Get-together in Glasgow. The event will include discussion groups, a delicious lunch, and the chance to socialise with friends old and new. Plus of course a keynote speaker, details soon to be announced.

agnes@ajr.org.uk

KINDER EVENTS
LUNCH
THURSDAY 15 MAY at 12pm

Calling all Kinder and their descendants

This informal lunch will be held at North London Venue, details to be advised upon booking, and will be an opportunity for Kinder from all generations to socialise and discuss plans and events for the coming year.

susan@ajr.org.uk

BOAT TRIP WITH AFTERNOON TEA
MONDAY 7 JULY 2025

Please join us for a riverboat trip and afternoon tea on the Thames from Henley

Coach pick-ups in Edgware and Finchley Road

karendiamond@ajr.org.uk

TATTOOS WITH NEW MEANINGS

Alice Bloch explains how the Auschwitz number tattoo has taken on new meaning for the descendants of survivors

The number tattooed on the left forearm of prisoners selected for work, rather than immediate death, on arrival in Auschwitz is one of the most enduring visual representations of the crimes of the Nazis. Italian survivor Primo Levi, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, described how the tattoo dehumanised, branded people like cattle.

There is a small but growing trend among descendants of Auschwitz survivors of replicating the tattoo. I became interested in this phenomenon while watching the documentary *Numbered*, which featured a few descendants of survivors who had tattooed the number of their parent or grandparent on their own bodies. As a sociologist I wanted to investigate this trend by speaking with children and grandchildren of Auschwitz survivors to really understand the significance of the number tattoo in their lives. We discussed family relationships, the inter-generational legacy of the Holocaust, inter-generational memory practices, why they decided to reproduce the tattoo, its design and placement, and how others have reacted.

David Rubin is the grandson of Auschwitz survivor Piroska 'Perl' Levy. For David, replicating his grandmother's number gives him the chance to talk about her and the Holocaust and provides a topic of conversation for the fourth generation, his children. David explained how he is, 'the last generation to hear the stories from that person who was in the Holocaust'. David spent years thinking about whether to get the number tattoo, finally going ahead after his grandmother passed, describing her death as 'a trigger'. David's tattoo tells a story. On the background of wood are spikey leaves that look like barbed wire with spikes that have 'turned into flowers' and so, said David 'taking the bad thing and creating it as a good thing'. Seven flowers represent David's grandmother and her six siblings. The four opened flowers are his grandmother and her surviving sisters, the closed ones represent the two sisters



David Rubin's tattoo incorporates his grandmother's number.

who were killed, while a lone flower at the bottom, is in memory of the brother who was also killed.

While David's tattoo tells a story, Tara Strauss Smith's is a replica of her grandmother's number. Tara took a newspaper cutting of her grandmother, Doris Strauss, to the tattoo artist to copy. Doris lived in Florida and had a balcony in her apartment where they sat to play cards, drink gin and tonic and where Tara would 'sneak' her cigarettes. It was there Tara learned her grandmother's story and they discussed the possibility of Tara's own tattoo, as she recalls:

'At first she said "I don't want you to have to live with that on your arm for the rest of your life the way I had to live with that." And I said, "But you don't understand. It's a way for me to remember you, for me to talk about you, for people to never forget.'"

Sometime later, Tara's grandmother brought it up in conversation and told Tara that she saw the meaning behind it. Tara's grandmother sometimes covered up her arm because, Tara said, she felt 'branded' but for Tara the tattoo has a very different meaning. According to Tara, '...every now and again I look down at it and like I put my hand on it and I rub it, like I remember I always used to rub my grandma's...I don't think that it brands me in any way.'

Decisions about design and placement vary. Some choose a visible place, while others choose places rarely seen, like the back of the ankle or the wrist where it can be covered up by a watch strap. Visible tattoos sometimes prompt questions about the Holocaust and the family member, providing the bearer with a way of keeping



David Rubin with a photograph of his grandmother Piroska 'Perl' Levy and himself at kindergarten.



Tara Strauss Smith holding a photo with her grandmother Doris Strauss on their trip to Paris.

the memory alive through a physical statement about family, family relationships and the the Holocaust. Replicating the number, on younger skin, in a very different place and time, gives it new meaning. Most of all however, it is an expression of love, a non-verbal way of communicating powerful emotions.

Alice Bloch is Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester. Alice received funding from British Academy/ Leverhulme Trust Small Research grant in partnership with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to support this research. For more info: <https://theconversation.com/descendants-of-holocaust-survivors-explain-why-they-are-replicating-auschwitz-tattoos-on-their-own-bodies-206821>

PHOTOS © ALICE BLOCH

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.

VOTING IN GERMANY

Before the German Federal elections in February there was a notice in the *AJR Journal* about registering to vote. As an American who “reclaimed” German citizenship, I had never previously thought about also gaining voting rights.

Registration requires proof that one has “gained personal and direct familiarity with the political situation and is affected by the political situation in Germany.”

If anyone residing in the UK (or elsewhere outside of Germany) who acquired German citizenship, but never lived in Germany, has had success in registering to vote there, I would be interested to learn how the requirement of familiarity with, and being affected by, the German political system was satisfied. Thank you.

Stephen Falk, Point Roberts, WA, USA
sfalkjd@gmail.com

CAIRO GENIZAH

On 31 March I was fortunate to attend an AJR organised visit to the Cambridge University Library for the lecture about manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah. The lecture by Dr Melonie Schmierer-Lee, co-author of the magnificent book *The Illustrated Cairo Genizah*, was a fascinating and passionate introduction to the topic. With inspiring passion she led us through centuries, backwards and forward in time, from the 19th century’s Scottish savants, sisters and intrepid travellers who began creating the Cairo Genizah treasure trove, back to the lives of Jewish people in the time of the Crusades and beyond.

After the talk we could look and even touch some protected documents exposed in the Library vitrines. Thanks AJR for this worthwhile experience and to Karen and Ros for all their good work.
Vesna Domany Hardy, London SE3

ISRAEL & GAZA (FROM THE EDITOR)

In the past month we have received several letters asking why the AJR has made no mention or condemnation of Israel’s attack on civilians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Dr Julia Nelki, for example, wrote that ‘To me, being a child of Jewish refugees means condemning all attacks on any ethnic group, especially on civilians and especially on children. ‘Never again’ means never again to anybody.’ She believes that ‘It is the silence that is deafening and the polarisation that is so risky’.

Jim Newmark asked: ‘Is it Editorial policy, or lack of interest, or something else, that means that the *AJR Journal*, and perhaps the AJR itself, appears to take little interest in what is happening in the wider context of Israeli politics?’

Anthony Lipmann also wrote: ‘The AJR appears through its pages to duck the issue of the actions of Israel that so many – including me – view as genocidal, barbaric, heartless and arrogant’. He urged us to set aside some pages each month to hear the voices of those in Israel and elsewhere who are unhappy with the direction that the Israeli government is taking.

Like the majority of Jewish organisations in the diaspora, the AJR is constantly mindful of, and concerned about, the fast-moving situation in the Middle East. While we have refrained from publicly advocating either for or against the actions of any parties, we have regularly published commentary from our members and readers in these pages and, until very recently, had a monthly Letter from Israel which struggled to maintain a balance between sharing the experience of everyday life in Israel during the conflict and outright condemnation of government policy. We do not shy away from the latter.

However, as our annual report on pages 9 – 14 of this issue clearly shows, the AJR is not a political organisation. We are rooted in delivering social welfare to Jewish victims of Nazism and in keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive by engaging descendants in the UK and funding Holocaust education. This necessarily provides the focus for all our activities and for the contents of this Journal.

The *AJR Journal* warmly invites written contributions from all our members,

however controversial, with a clear disclaimer that the views expressed throughout this publication are not necessarily the views of the AJR. We will continue to offer these pages as a forum for all your views, but please be assured that our own focus will always be on the core remit of our charitable organisation.
Jo Briggs, Editor, AJR Journal



Please join us for a private guided tour of **WILLESDEN JEWISH CEMETERY**

TUESDAY 22 JULY 2025



karendiamond@ajr.org.uk



Join us at a special central London venue for a talk by **LADY AURELIA YOUNG**

MONDAY 23 JUNE 2025 12PM



Lady Young will be talking about her father, renowned sculptor and refugee Oscar Nemon, his life and his famous sculptures



karendiamond@ajr.org.uk

LOOKING FOR?

ALFRÉD GEIRINGER

Cameron Woodrow seeks information concerning any surviving relatives of Alfréd Geiringer, born 13 November 1909 in Holíč, Skalica, in what is now the Slovak Republic. His last-known address is 19 Wiltern Court, 29 Shoot-up-Hill, London NW2. Alfréd is pictured third from right at this high school reunion in 1968.

cameron.woodrow@dft.gov.uk



WARTH MILL

A researcher is looking for information about any so-called enemy aliens, who passed through Warth Mill (or Wharfe Mill), Bury, Lancashire, on their way to internment on the Isle of Man, Canada or Australia in the 1940s. Warth Mill was a derelict cotton mill with much of the original machinery and oil-spattered floors.

editorial@ajr.org.uk

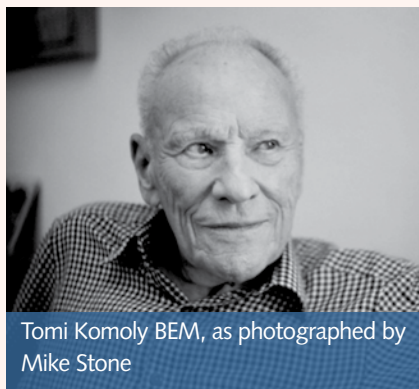
PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS

Photographer Mike Stone is working on an exhibition for the Wiener Holocaust Library and would love to hear from or about anyone who was a forced or slave labourer in Nazi industry.

The resulting photos will be featured in an exhibition at the Wiener Library in Spring 2026.

07721 844 380 or

mike@mikestone.co.uk



Tomi Komoly BEM, as photographed by Mike Stone

TOUCHING PHOTOGRAPHS

Sara Davidmann is an award-winning artist based in London who is currently working with Professor Marianne Hirsch of Columbia University on a project looking at how photographs prompt and shape our memories.

In the afternoon of 3 June Sara & Marianne are hosting a free event at the University of Oxford on the topic of what photographs

from the European Jewish world before the Holocaust tell us about Jewish life and how the legacies of its destruction have shaped subsequent generations. Attendance can be online or in person, with the opportunity to bring and discuss your own photographs.

<https://oclw.web.ox.ac.uk/event/jewish-womens-voices-seminar-touching-photographs/prompting-postmemories-a-conversation-with-s>



Cards of Care's Holocaust Survivor Postcard Project provides an opportunity directly to share messages of strength, hope, and solidarity with returning Israeli hostages.

Organisers of the project believe that the resilience and wisdom of Holocaust survivors can serve as a guiding light. Victims of 7 October and their families, most recently Eli Sharabi, have reported that receiving words of hope from other survivors of trauma is a source of immense comfort and strength.

First and even next generation Holocaust survivors are invited to contribute to this meaningful initiative by sharing a written message of encouragement to returning Israeli hostages. Your insights and experiences can offer invaluable support to these individuals, reminding them that resilience is possible even in the face of immense adversity.

These messages will be incorporated into personalised cards that will be decorated by students. The cards will then be hand delivered to the survivors in Israel.

If you would like to participate, please contact nicci@cardsofcare.org.uk or call **07968 364 739**.

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ART NOTES: by Gloria Tessler

How much do we really know about the 19th century French writer, Victor Hugo? He was the humanist and idealist who gave us *Les Miserables* – perhaps more familiar to us as the musical *Les Mis* – and of course for his other great novel, *Notre Dame de Paris* (The Hunchback of Notre Dame).

But we know him less as an artist, whose drawings are poetic and symbolist and capture his vivid and dramatic imagination and his experiments with abstraction. In *Astonishing Things: The Drawings of Victor Hugo*, the **Royal Academy** presents some 70 of Hugo's rarely seen artworks on paper, last exhibited in the UK over 50 years ago. They are garnered from several European collections, and reveal the secret drawings of the writer, closeted and out of view. His subject choices were as idiosyncratic as the man himself. A serpent, an octopus, a shipwreck, a townscape without people, castles, turbulent seas and shipwrecks. Mainly in pen and ink and wash, they reflect his personal odyssey for equality and freedom.

While an acclaimed and widely published man of letters, Hugo spent nearly 20 years in exile after 1851, as a result of his outspoken opposition to the *coup d'etat* by Napoleon III and his increasingly authoritarian rule. Hugo fled France and moved to Belgium before spending time in Jersey and finally Guernsey. In these private drawings, Hugo's imagination is laid bare, sometimes in tandem with his written work.



Victor Hugo, *The Town of Vianden seen through a Spider's Web*, 1871

Both his writing and his drawing went on to inspire Symbolist poets and many artists, from Surrealists André Breton and Max Ernst to contemporary artists such as Raymond Pettibon and Antony Gormley RA. Vincent van Gogh compared his artwork to "astonishing things", hence the exhibition title.

Hugo's unusual methods, including blots, rubbings, imprints of ink-soaked lace, washes and automatic writing, convey his interest in spiritualism and the irrational. Sometimes the lines are blurred between the figurative and the abstract. He created *The Town of Vianden Seen Through a Spider's Web* in 1871 during his stay in Luxembourg after being exiled from Belgium for offering asylum to Communards. He wrote of it: "I drew in my travel book the large spider's web through which we see the ruin of Vianden like a spectre." Another pen and brown ink drawing, *Chain*, which bears the cartouche *Les Miserables*, was completed after the novel's publication.

His drawings of ruins and townscapes and castles vary between the monumental and the minute. *Mushroom* (1850) is a giant anthropomorphic toadstool, but has relevance to modern viewers who might well see a rather frightening foretelling of

20th century atomic bomb explosions.

Hugo was a respected public figure known for his embrace of the ideals of the French Republic but also for his campaigns against capital punishment. His 1854 drawing *Ecce Le*, like his novella *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* (The Last Day of a Condemned Man), expresses his opposition to the death penalty. It followed his unsuccessful attempt to secure a reprieve for the murderer John Tapner who was hanged in Guernsey on 10 February 1954. Hugo made four subsequent drawings of the subject. He also appealed to the United States against the death sentence passed on the American abolitionist John Brown. Hugo's images were circulated through print reproductions by his brother-in-law Paul Chenay and achieved publicity for his anti-death penalty activism.

His attitude towards nature and time are revealed in his drawings of ruins and mountains, and his great interest in the sea. His lesser-known 1866 novel, *The Toilers of the Sea*, was clearly based on this obsession with the ocean. Concepts of nature and time deeply intrigued him and generated an entire philosophy of history, culture and humanity.

Until 29 June 2025


**TRIP TO
SANDWICH IN KENT**
Home of the Kitchener Camp
THURSDAY 19 JUNE 2025

Join us for a special walking tour of Sandwich, Kent led by Clare Ungerson

Travel is by train from London St Pancras Station

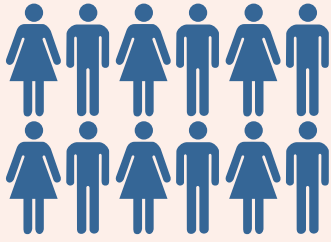
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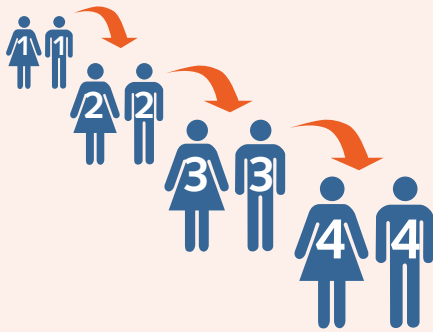
1,857

AJR MEMBERS

OF WHOM

600+

ARE 1ST GENERATION



1,202

2ND – 4TH GENERATION MEMBERS



200+

NEW REFERRALS TO OUR SOCIAL WORKERS



500 GROUP MEETINGS, EITHER IN PERSON OR VIA ZOOM

2,000 FOLLOWERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

665,000 VIEWS ACROSS FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK

38,500 VISITORS TO THE AJR REFUGEE VOICES ARCHIVE

18

FUNDING PARTNERS RECEIVING A TOTAL OF

£304,004 VIA EDUCATIONAL GRANTS

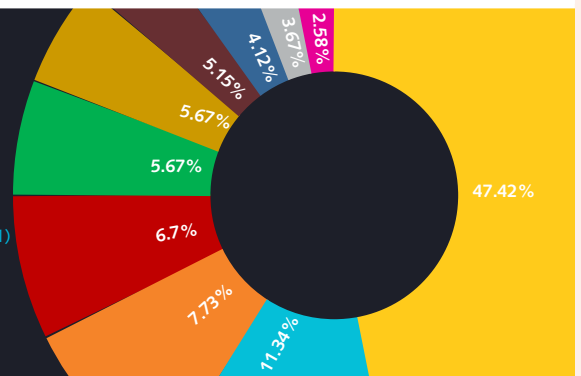
388,000 HOURS OF CARE FUNDED FOR AJR MEMBERS

200

AJR VOLUNTEERS

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF VOLUNTEERS

- LONDON (92)
- MANCHESTER (22)
- GLASGOW (15)
- LEEDS (13)
- STANMORE (11)
- UNKNOWN (11)
- PINNER (10)
- SALFORD (8)
- EDGEWARE (7)
- LIVERPOOL (5)



£8,279,435

TOTAL INCOME



£10,223,758

TOTAL EXPENDITURE



£8,031,673

DIRECTLY ALLOCATED TO MEMBERS FOR HOMECARE AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES



£18,126,888

RESERVES CARRIED FORWARD



£0.7M

INVESTMENT GAINS

300 MEMBERS RECEIVING VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

69,599 MINUTES OF FACE-TO-FACE VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

2024 AJR ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Last year was another full twelve months of the AJR doing what we do best: attending to the needs and interests of our unique community.

We disbursed the highest amount of Homecare to the highest number of recipients, enabling refugees and survivors to live at home in comfort and in dignity and security. We provided services from the very north of Scotland all the way down to Cornwall and back across to East Anglia, and we again showed our leadership in the field of Holocaust education and remembrance,

2024 began just weeks after the 85th anniversary of the first Kindertransport, which provided a focus for many activities during the year. Standout memories include Kinder standing to receive the applause from the packed-out Wigmore Hall audience at the memorial concert we organised in May. Even Tom Conti was blown away! We also took four Winton Kinder to Prague in September for the official opening of Sir Nicholas Winton Road.

2024 was also the year in which the UK assumed the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance with the AJR playing central roles to deliver the presidency theme of 'In Plain Sight', drawing attention to the fact that the Holocaust did not happen in a dark corner.

As the UK's leading benefactor of Holocaust education and remembrance projects and programmes, the AJR partnered with several new educational organisations. We also strove to engage with and sign up more descendants of Holocaust survivors and refugees, to honour the experiences of the first generation and ensure their stories continue to be told.

We carried out our work against the backdrop of the atrocities of 7 October 2023 which cast a long shadow and had a great impact on our members and their families, as well as across the wider Jewish community. The terror attacks also led to an unprecedented increase in antisemitism as well as incidents of Holocaust distortion.

While continuing to support our members during these sensitive times, we also contributed to roundtable discussions with education organisations to coordinate how best to respond.

Here is a round up of the AJR's activities during 2024.

OUTREACH

We offered AJR members a choice of over 500 meetings, events and outings throughout the UK, attended by first, second and third generation members. This included an active Zoom programme of at least three meetings per week, covering an array of interesting topics.

Events of note included our Annual HMD Service in January 2024, attended by almost 150 members, when our guest speaker was Lady Milena Grenfell-Baines, and an event at Norwich Cathedral for AJR members and the local Jewish Community at which Anita Peleg spoke about her mother, Naomi Blake, one of whose sculptures is housed in the Cathedral. We also organised day trips to Brighton, Worthing and the National Holocaust Museum in Nottinghamshire, and an overnight trip to Highclere Castle (aka *Downton Abbey*).

Our annual five-day trip was based in Liverpool with excursions to Chester, Llandudno, Grwyth Castle – where some 300 Jewish refugees were housed on their arrival – and a presentation by a violinist from the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. This was truly a trip for all generations, with great friendships formed.

We organised a four-day holiday in Eastbourne aimed at the first generation and less able members, which included a visit to the new Jewish Community Centre in Hove. Meanwhile our more active members were invited to join the new AJR Ramblers Club, which meets once a month for a gentle and sociable stroll.

Our Annual Tea at the end of September was greatly enjoyed by over 180 guests, our highest turnout for many years. Guests at our annual Kristallnacht Service included UK and international government representatives and we were honoured to

hear the powerful testimony of Manfred Goldberg.

During May, as part of our activities marking the 85th anniversary of the Kindertransport, we facilitated a visit from a group of 30 Kinder from the USA. Their itinerary included a guided tour of Harwich and the wonderful commemorative concert at Wigmore Hall. Meanwhile our online Kinder Contact Project met monthly and we held quarterly lunches.

SOCIAL WORK

Our social work team had another busy year, helping members to access funding for Homecare and other vital welfare services to enable them to remain safely at home; as well as applying for benefits, advocating on their behalf with other agencies and being available for emotional support or even just a cup of tea. We received 200 new referrals during the year.

There have been quite a few changes amongst the team. We are sad to be saying farewell to Jim Sutherland on his well-deserved retirement. Madeleine Herman is taking a break from work to enjoy being with her young children, and Aimee Cooke has moved away from London. We wish them all well and are delighted to welcome Blessing Duncan-Lynch, who was a student on placement with us and is taking over from Aimee. We are also delighted that our team administrator Rebecca Webb is now a Social Work apprentice.

EDUCATION & HERITAGE

Educational Grants & Projects

The AJR is proud to be the UK's largest dedicated funder of Holocaust education projects and initiatives. During 2024 the combined total of awarded grants exceeded £300,000. A full list of the recipient organisations and their projects can be found on page 13.

We were at the forefront of the UK's presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), introducing important legacy projects as well as participating in two major plenaries during the year.

AJR Refugees Voices Archive

The reach of our testimony archive grew, as

2024 AJR ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS

we enabled researchers, partner institutions, curators, journalists and family members to access our library of video interviews, transcripts, photographs & documents.

The team recorded 22 new interviews with first generation members. A clip of Bridget Newman, who came from Berlin via Kindertransport aged just six, received over 250,000 views.

Dr Bea Lewkowicz, the Director of our archive, spoke at numerous events organised by third parties and, together with AJR trustee Danny Kalman, delivered talks to different AJR groups.

Bea, together with Susanna Kleeman, also curated the *80 Objects/80 Lives* online exhibition and the new *Holocaust Testimony UK Portal*, the legacy project of the British IHRA presidency. The portal, fully launched in December 2024, facilitates easy access to some 3,500 recorded Holocaust testimonies of UK refugees and survivors.

My Story

The *My Story* book archive, comprising 45 individual books telling the life stories of a variety of AJR members covering all experiences such as Kindertransport, refugee with family, hidden children, and camp survivors, was another valuable resource.

Next Generations

A key part of the AJR's strategy for the future is to recruit the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of survivors and refugees to join us. To this end, during 2024 we organised numerous events and activities specifically for the younger generations. We also encouraged our existing members to point their younger family members in our direction, even introducing the concept of gifting AJR membership for Chanukah.

Reclaiming European citizenship is a popular topic among younger generations and we organised a series of in-person and online events with the consulates of the relevant European nations. A new WhatsApp group for our third and fourth generation members facilitates discussion about these and other topics, and we also distribute dedicated Next Generations and 3/4G e-newsletters.

Attendance at the World Federation of Holocaust Survivors and Descendants conference in Toronto helped to expand our collaborative partnerships while, in November, we were delighted to take a group of 3/4Gs of Austrian descent on an educational trip to Vienna, partly funded by the Vienna Welcome Service.

PR & Communications

By spotlighting historical milestones and amplifying AJR events such as Kindertransport and Kristallnacht commemorations and the Wigmore Hall concert, we secured extensive national media coverage, including TV, radio and online and printed newspapers.

A key focus was to build on AJR's profile as thought leaders by showcasing our vast in-house expertise. We issued several statements in response to acts of Holocaust distortion which featured on numerous news outlets and widely on social media.

We also built our share of coverage in the UK's Jewish media, including adding our condolences on the passing of Auschwitz survivor Lily Ebert and Kind Henry Wuga particularly capturing hearts and minds.

Social Media

During 2024 the AJR significantly boosted its social media presence, making use of members' testimonies to create engaging and easily shareable human-interest stories. We also showcased AJR events, collaborated with media outlets and public figures and shared content about Holocaust history.

These activities attracted over 665,000 views across Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, compared to just 21,000 in 2023. We also saw an increase of 2,000 followers across these platforms, up from 193.

We will continue to expand the range of members' experiences shared on our platforms and to collaborate with AJR's funding partners to reach new audiences.

Through consistent, sensitive and compelling content, our goal remains to honour the legacy of AJR members, educate the public, and foster connection across generations.

AJR-owned media outlets

We began work on a new AJR website and e-newsletter to improve our connection with potential new members and to resonate with younger audiences.

The *AJR Journal* continues to be one of the most visible and widely appreciated benefits of membership, attracting healthy debate about matters of interest to AJR members both within and around its pages. We are now extending its content into social and other media, for example by repurposing precious details from the hundreds of obituaries and personal stories featured during the years.

VOLUNTEERS

AJR's Volunteer and Community team provided members with one-to-one befriending support and other activities to strengthen their sense of community.

Activities appeal to the broadest range of members, including those living with memory loss and dementia. Our *Poetry Please* fortnightly zoom sessions have a staunch following, as do our weekly online exercise classes. We also host monthly games and chat sessions in London and Manchester.

This year we began online German conversation sessions. Some members want to reconnect with their, or their parents', mother tongue, whilst others are learning German for the first time. Sessions are grouped by ability, with the emphasis on fun.

Our friendly volunteers made approximately 850 calls to bring AJR's greetings to members on their birthday. We also sent Trustees and staff members to visit those celebrating their milestone 100th birthday. Piggybacking on a staff member's planned holiday, we even visited a member in Sydney, Australia.

Our quarterly newsletter for volunteers updates them about training sessions, new initiatives and in-person gatherings.

Our London Volunteer Thank You event took place at JW3 in June, highlighting our volunteers' contribution to the *My Story* project. During Carers Week, in June, we hosted a tea with an inspirational speaker on [Continued on page 12](#)

2024 AJR ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (CONTINUED)

Continued from page 11

resilience. We also had a session about the emotional challenge of supporting a loved one in residential care.

GOVERNANCE & STAFF

The priorities and programmes of the AJR are decided by a Board of Directors (aka Trustees), who are responsible for the charitable company's overall financial policy, the disbursement of financial support, and for managing funds to benefit the membership.

I should like to pay tribute to six very special people – **Eleanor Angel MBE, Frank Harding MBE, Gaby Glassman, Andrew Kaufman MBE, Anthony Spiro OBE and Philippa Strauss** – whose respective terms as Trustees each came to an end in December and who, collectively, have provided us with almost 200 years of invaluable support and guidance.

The AJR is delighted that one of these retiring Trustees – Andrew Kaufman MBE – is now our Honorary Life President, while two new Trustees – Anthony Hellman and Janet Lew – were officially appointed on 11 December at our Annual Election Meeting.

There were also some changes within the AJR's permanent staff. Alana Riedl started in February as part time PA to Michael Newman. Caryn Bentley resigned in November as Carers Support to pursue a career in counselling, with Tommy Gambrill appointed in February 2025. Owing to a reduction in workload Christine Jones left her role administering Self-Aid applications, with our thanks for her long service.

As part of my chairmanship of the AJR I am lucky to meet members of all generations. While inevitably the demography of our membership is changing, our primary

commitment to our members remains the extensive social welfare assistance that we, exclusively, offer. But it is one thing to have the means to help, it is another to deliver it with kindness, empathy and dedication. Each person involved in delivering this support, from my fellow Trustees, through Michael Newman and his senior leadership team, to all the AJR staff and volunteers, should be rightly proud of the role they play in making sure our support reaches those with the greatest needs. This, combined with our roles as the UK's largest funder of and advocate for Holocaust education and the natural hub for any descendants of Holocaust refugees to engage with their heritage, makes me continually proud to be at the helm of such a wonderful charity.

MIKE KARP OBE
Chairman

TREASURER'S REPORT

In 2024 we received and distributed our largest grant from the Claims Conference to date and I am excited to share that in 2025 the Claims Conference grant has once again increased.

The delivery of financial support to our members and the wider Umbrella Group, which we lead, has continued to grow. Welfare payments for care and other emergency services funded from all sources increased by £0.3m (4%) to £6.7m, of which the AJR itself contributed £0.6m in Self-Aid payments to our most vulnerable members.

As always, we extend gratitude to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany for providing the balance, and for their continued support, and congratulate them on their hugely successful negotiations with the governments of Germany and Austria

which provide funds for this life-changing support. Their funding to the entire Umbrella Group increased by £1.5m (11%). Throughout the course of the year, 388,000 hours of care were funded for AJR members and 510,000 hours for survivors and refugees through other Umbrella Group agencies, an increase of 6% from last year.

The Trustees of the AJR remain committed to ensuring that the historical memory of the Holocaust and its impact are preserved through general education as well as in ways that are personal to our members. To this end, more than £300k was allocated to projects, partnering the AJR with other educational institutions.

We are thankful that we continue to receive legacy income, and we remain grateful to the foresight and generosity of former members whose bequests support the organisation and enable us to deliver both our services and our mission. I echo the messages of our chairman and

encourage our members to remember that legacies provide a vital income source enabling us to continue and further our charitable work.

Global financial markets returned to growth in 2024, and we saw investment gains of £0.7m, a significant improvement against the £0.2m of losses suffered in 2023. The Trustees continue to take regular steps to ensure the organisation has sufficient liquid resources to maintain our vital services. Our reserves remain strong, thus enabling us to ensure that these services can continue uninterrupted for the foreseeable future.

I offer my sincerest thanks to the finance team for their incredibly hard work and diligence and look forward to further helping to steer our great organisation at this critical time.

MIRIAM KINGSLEY
Treasurer
28 March 2025

2024 AJR ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS

NOTABLE AJR EDUCATIONAL GRANTS AWARDED IN 2024

UCL CENTRE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

– GRANT: £92,844.51 OVER THREE YEARS

In 2024 we were pleased to welcome one of the county's leading Holocaust educational centres to our team of funding partners. This multi-year grant will support an annual intensive study visit to Berlin for teachers.

WIENER HOLOCAUST LIBRARY

– GRANT: £50,000

The AJR is pleased to continue our longstanding support of the Library as it works towards its three core aims: strengthening its voice in the sector; active care for its precious collections; and increasing the reach and dissemination of powerful evidence held at the Library.

HOLOCAUST CENTRE NORTH

– GRANT: £50,000

Our grant is supporting HCN's *Class of '33* project, consisting of learning sessions to schools on site; an outreach programme for schools in remote areas of the North; training for every teacher qualifying at the University of Huddersfield; and regular Sunday openings for families.

NATIONAL HOLOCAUST CENTRE MUSEUM – GRANT: £50,000

We are continuing our support of 'The Journey' outreach programme to schools, which aims to engage with schools with high levels of deprivation and those in parts of the country currently under-served by Holocaust Education.

BRUNDBAR ARTS FESTIVAL

– GRANT: £5,000

We were pleased to support this festival in Newcastle dedicated to performing music and arts created by victims of the Holocaust.

THE AMELIA SCOTT

– GRANT: £20,000 OVER TWO YEARS

The AJR has renewed our support of the Amelia Scott, an arts centre in Tunbridge Wells, which is organising a

series of HMD events and an exhibition centring on a local Kindertransport story.

VOICES OF THE HOLOCAUST

– GRANT: £16,800

Extending our relationship with this educational theatre charity, we awarded a grant to fund school and community productions of the play *Kindness*, based on the testimony of survivor and AJR member Susan Pollack.

GOOD CHANCE THEATRE

– GRANT: £10,000

The renowned theatre company produced site-based outdoor performances of 'From Here On', a larger multi-country public arts project focusing on the Kindertransport

CORE FOUNDATION

– GRANT: £10,000

We once again supported 'Echo Eternal', a live performance and education programme inspired by and in tribute to Holocaust Survivor testimony. This year student participants were invited to Buckingham Palace for HM King Charles III.

BOLTON SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK

– GRANT: £10,000 OVER THREE YEARS

Following on from the successful completion of an AJR-funded pilot phase, this project is now aiming to expand into more schools, bringing a session which looks at how Holocaust victims and survivors define themselves and their experiences through art.

MACCABI GB

– GRANT: £9,750

Our support of the Yellow Candle Project helps to ensure that schools, synagogues and communities across the UK are able to participate in a shared moment of remembrance each Yom HaShoah.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

– GRANT: £6,812.50

University of Sussex was the first UK university to mark Holocaust Memorial Day and the AJR has supported their

annual event since its inception.

COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

– GRANT: £5,000

Our longtime partners CCJ have assembled a coalition of organisations to develop educational resources for Scottish schools based on the story of Jane Haining, a Scottish missionary who was murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST

– GRANT: £5,000

The AJR has renewed its support of NLT's programme, 'Improving Written Literacy: Holocaust Memorial Day, Remembering the Children who survived the Holocaust'. Educational activities centre around original stories written by Tom Palmer, author of 'After the War' which focuses on the experiences of 'The Windermere Boys'.

YOM HASHOAH UK

– GRANT: £5,000

The AJR continued its longstanding support for the delivery of the national Yom Hashoah event. Last year the event was held at Victoria Tower Gardens, next to the Houses of Parliament.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS

– GRANT: £3,000

With support from the AJR, RIBA created the 'Refugee Committee Papers' online database and hosted a related conference, highlighting the contributions of Jewish refugees to British architecture.

WELLS MALTINGS TRUST

– GRANT: £2,200

Recognising a gap in Holocaust Memorial Day programming in the region, we were pleased to award a grant to for a series of HMD events and educational workshops in North Norfolk.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

– GRANT: £1,125

Our grant funded the creation of a portable exhibition on Jewish refugee academics who worked at the university.

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FINANCE REPORT

The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR)
 Summary Income and Expenditure Accounts
 Year ended 31st December 2024

NB all figures are subject to audit

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
Income:				
Claims Conference, Six Point & Other Grants	6,948,055		6,454,748	
Subscriptions/Donations	84,078		86,240	
Investment income	363,201		511,524	
Other Income	86,938		26,498	
		7,482,272		7,079,010
Legacies		797,163		1,377,539
Total Income		8,279,435		8,456,549
Less outgoings:				
Self-Aid, Homecare and Emergency Grants	6,717,716		6,444,638	
Social Services and other member services	1,313,957		1,339,570	
AJR Journal	83,785		84,603	
Other organisations	304,004		300,372	
Internal Educational and testimony projects	213,749		284,480	
Administration/Depreciation	1,590,547		1,372,713	
		10,223,758		9,826,376
Net outgoing resources for the year		-1,944,323		-1,369,827
Surplus/-Deficiency on realised and unrealised investments		699,990		-206,406
Net movement in funds		-1,244,333		-1,576,233

The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR)
 Summary Balance Sheet
 Year ended 31st December 2024

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
Fixed Assets and Investments		13,696,333		16,105,127
Current assets	7,612,594		6,032,041	
Current liabilities	3,182,039		2,765,947	
Net current assets		4,430,555		3,266,094
Net assets		18,126,888		19,371,221
Reserves brought forward		19,371,221		20,947,454
Net movement in funds for the year		-1,244,333		-1,576,233
Reserves Carried Forward		18,126,888		19,371,221

TWO REFUGEE ARTISTS

Two recent exhibitions have reminded us of the impact and the range of a generation of refugee artists who came to Britain. The two artists exhibited are not as famous as contemporaries like Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. But both were interesting and led fascinating and very different lives.

The first exhibition was at The Arc Gallery on Jewry Street in Winchester and ran from 22 January until 24 March. It showed the work of the German refugee ceramicist Hans Coper. Hans Joachim Coper (1920-81) was born in Chemnitz, Saxony, the second son of Julius Coper, a Jewish businessman, and his wife Erna. The family moved to Dresden where Hans's father committed suicide in 1936. In 1939 Hans fled to England. He was interned in 1940, sent to Canada, where he was again interned, from 1940-1, and then returned to Britain where he was naturalised in 1958.

Soon after the war he met Lucie Rie (perhaps the most famous refugee potter of her generation) and joined her studio as an assistant. He was one of the many refugees whose career was transformed by The Festival of Britain in 1951. Soon after, his pots were exhibited with Rie at The Berkeley Galleries in 1954 and again in 1956. His first major solo show was in London in 1988 but he is perhaps best known for the 7' candlesticks he made for the new Coventry Cathedral. From 1961 he taught part-time at The Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts and from 1966 he also taught at The Royal College of Art. Coper died tragically young in 1961.

The exhibition in Winchester includes vases, pitchers and pots from the 1950s and 1960s and these show the minimalist style he was famous for, inspired by the work of Brancusi and Giacometti, on the one hand, and ancient pottery, on the other. They feature a simple palette of black, brown and white.

The second exhibition, at London's Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, shows a number of small pen and ink drawings and larger paintings



Hans Coper at work



Franciszka Themerson, Interior at Schnackenburg (IX), 1929

by the Polish refugee artist, Franciszka Themerson née Weinles (1907-88). She was born into a Jewish family in Warsaw and studied at the School of Fine Art in the Polish capital from 1924-31, where she used a more Polish name, Wajnleż. In 1937 she went to Paris, then the centre of modern art, with her husband, the artist Stefan Themerson (1910-88). They moved there in 1938, then in 1940 they escaped to London where they spent the rest of their lives. She illustrated children's books, worked on experimental films and in stage and graphic design.

Few paintings of hers survive from these early years. Just three works from 1929. In her catalogue, Jasia Reichardt describes the early works: 'There are no gaps, no empty spaces, that are so common in the later paintings. ... They are dense, tonal with an occasional exclamation like the pink hyacinth which bursts out from the surface in the green interior.' What is important, Reichardt goes on, is the subject matter: 'interiors in warm, brown, beige, green tones. There is a restaurant, a dressmaking workshop, and an entertainment hall...' The pen and ink drawings are charming: interiors, drawings in the open air and a beautiful series of drawings of her cat Anastasia.

She exhibited her work regularly at galleries throughout Europe including London, Paris, New York, Warsaw, Stockholm, Edinburgh and other cities during the following decades. In 1967, her work was included in the *British Drawing Today* show at the ICA, London. In 1975, she went on to have a one-person show at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. In 2009, Tate Britain presented *Lightbox: Stefan & Franciszka Themerson*, where several of her works are held in the permanent collection

These two exhibitions remind us of the lives and work of two refugee artists who both died some years ago but, in their heyday, had a significant impact on British culture.

David Herman

REVIEWS

CHILDREN OF RADIUM: A BURIED INHERITANCE

By Joe Dunthorne
Hamish Hamilton

Siegfried, the author's Wagnerian-named Jewish great grandfather, wrote an impenetrable memoir towards the end of his life that no one in the family can finish. Unpromising material, you might think, for a Holocaust era story of Jewish tribulation and survival. But in author Joe Dunthorne's hands, the story defies expectation to avoid a rehearsal of cruelty, cattle trucks, Nazi guards and persecution, and is instead something altogether very different.

It turns out that great grandfather Siegfried was one of the chosen. Selected by the top Nazis at Oranienburg on account of his knowledge of gas masks to work on chemicals, his masks were designed to shield against (and thus be preserved from the camps, the closest of which was Sachsenhausen).

We are in the territory of Fritz Haber (1868-1934) whose work on chlorine contributed to the use of poison gas in WW1 and the development of Zyklon B (Hydrogen Cyanide) for the gas chambers; Jewish scientists whose discoveries and genius were harnessed to Jewish destruction.

Great grandfather, it turns out, is not the 'grandpa-ish' old man of family memory but holds a deep secret kept from his descendants; one that, by being internalised, is the possible cause of his later mental illness.

It all seems a long way from the author's life in Wales and his prickly relationship with his grandma in Scotland who tells her impertinent grandson, when he questions her, that he is asking all the wrong questions about the Holocaust and he should 'just read a book'.

As the story is revealed in a suspenseful way, I want to avoid spoilers. Suffice it to say, the author's storytelling (like Ariana Neumann's in *When Time Stopped* or Philippe Sands' in *East West Street*) is founded on their generation's perseverance to unearth dusty documents,

many in German, from archives in USA and Germany. It is these that allow the author to come to some astonishing conclusions.

How is it, he asks, that his great grandfather is able to bring up his Jewish family in Berlin in relative peace during the mid-1930s and then transfer to Ankara, Turkey?

To avoid telling Joe Dunthorne's story for him, I will only mention that my own grandfather, a chemist, believed mistakenly that his ownership of a varnishing and paint factory would allow our family to be one of the chosen too. This delusion led to his death and my mother and grandmother's full tour of four of the most infamous camps.

The book begs us to ask questions about how the motive for personal survival compromises us; what self-deceptions are we prepared to invent to save our bodies, and with what consequences on the soul? The thousand-page memoir typed by Siegfried in a New York mental hospital years later tells its own tale.

Having myself spent a lifetime in the metals industry, in the world of chemicals and elements the book raises questions I might ask of myself – to what extent are elements in the periodic table good or bad? Do molecules have intrinsic evil or is it merely their use which makes them so? To what extent does Einstein, you might ask, bear responsibility for the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and the unleashing of the nuclear arms race?

Does Siegfried, the chemical genius and maker of gas masks, tested using phosgene and mustard gas, bear responsibility for the gas chambers?

Uncomfortable questions come with great literature, of which this story is one, which will take its special place amongst the ever-growing list of Holocaust literature.

The jaw-dropping title is taken from a brand of toothpaste called *Doramad* whose exciting radioactivity is proclaimed as a teeth-whitening agent made at the plant where Siegfried works. Who was to know that the wonders of radium-emitted X-Rays used by Marie Curie in her X-Ray vans on the front in WW1 to improve surgeons' outcomes in pinpointing of shrapnel before operations, would later be seen to be the cause of cancers?

The toothpaste was used in Siegfried's home and given to his children, but it cannot whiten his legacy in his great grandson's eyes.

Anthony Lipmann

THE LAST DAYS OF BUDAPEST: SPIES, NAZIS, RESCUERS AND RESISTANCE 1940 – 1945

By Adam LeBor
Head of Zeus

Budapest's wartime history, from the glory of another age to the city's ignominious fall as war ended with half the Jewish population perished, is told in this utterly fascinating new account. This mesmerising book contains a mass of intricate details, intrigue and extremely unpalatable facts all woven together.

Using newly uncovered poignant diaries, documents and archival material, author Adam LeBor brings to life the terrifying once grand city's end. It is a tale of glamorous aristocrats, spies and resistance, intrigue, betrayal, weak leadership, Nazis, extremism and brutality of the far-right Arrow Cross party. The account starts with a vivid description of pre-World War I Hungary, with its glitz and glamour, followed by the aftermath. Then the counter-revolutionary White Terror, aimed at destroying supporters of Hungary's short-lived Soviet republic and Red Terror in 1919.

Admiral Miklós Horthy triumphantly emerged as leader that November, soon becoming Regent for nearly 25 years until October 1944. Jews had much more freedom than in other countries but he increasingly passed antisemitic legislation, leading to a scientific and cultural exodus. Talented people of Jewish heritage who left included Eduard Teller, János Neumann and Leó Szilárd, key contributors to the Manhattan Project that developed America's atomic weapons, as well as the conductor György Solti and film directors Sándor Korda, Emeric Pressberger and Mihály Kertész, who later directed *Casablanca*.

Horthy's desire to reclaim lands lost with the punitive 1920 Treaty of Trianon led him into an alliance with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. But even four years into the war the Hungarian capital was at peace. It remained the oasis in central Europe where Allied POWs and Polish and Jewish refugees gained sanctuary. It was also home to spies

including aristocratic heroines, agents of every kind and forgers. The high profile Andrassy Palace was an open-centre of anti-Nazi resistance.

Meanwhile riverside cafés and the city's famed cultural life thrived, only to be swiftly curtailed after March 1944 with the Nazi invasion following Horthy's plans to change sides. Soon the 250,000 or so strong Jewish community – the last to be relatively intact in Europe – was targeted, with Jews being deported or sent to labour camps. By summer allied bombers pounded the grand boulevards and historic squares, causing massive destruction. Violent and barbaric Arrow Cross death squads roamed the streets, and the surviving Jewish population had been forcibly relocated to cramped, overcrowded Yellow Star houses.

A foretaste of what was to come had happened in January 1942, when thousands of Serbian Jews and Serbs met the terrible fate of being shot into the River Danube at Novi Sad by Hungarian soldiers. Now Budapest's Jews were similarly massacred by the Arrow Cross. By late December the city fell under siege as the Red Army approached, conditions were terrible with disease and starvation rife. Tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians died in the savage siege as Budapest collapsed into anarchy and chaos.

This is an extremely comprehensive, absorbing and sometimes very distressing account of horrific times, using newly uncovered diaries, documents and archival material. It also includes notes about what happened to each leading person featured after the war and covers a wealth of material which is enough to develop several books on different aspects.

Janet Weston

CONCERT: A KIND OF HAUNTING

The moving world premiere of Michael Zev Gordon's autobiographical *A Kind of Haunting* for two narrators, baritone and string orchestra, formed the memorable highlight of a concert to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2, given by the Britten Sinfonia conducted by Jonathan Berman at Milton Court on 25 March 2025, broadcast on *BBC Radio 3* on 9 April.

Following stirring performances of wartime works by Martinu and Strauss, *A Kind of*

Haunting explores the composer's own emotional and physical journey to confront the story of his paternal grandfather who lived in the Polish village of Yanov, who was murdered by the Nazis, along with members of the Jewish community, in the nearby forest in 1942.

As Gordon explains in a programme note, the translation of his grandmother's Yiddish diary in 2010 spurred him to make the journey to Poland in 2022, resulting in this composition, about the need to put shadows to rest. Somewhere between music theatre and song cycle, it makes its potent effect from the dramatic interweaving of words and music, recitation and song. Opening with a whisper of a Mordecai Gebirtig Yiddish song, an eerie backdrop of high shimmery strings accompanies the free, yet rhythmically coordinated narration (by actors Allan Corduner and Louisa Clein) of Gordon's deeply personal story intertwined with a more philosophical commentary on 'post-memory' – the inherited memory of family Holocaust experience by younger generations – by the eminent American scholar Marion Hirsch.

The flowing narration is interrupted by lyrical arias, setting five poems by the award winning-writer Jacqueline Saffra that reflect on the narratives. Baritone James Newby brought poignant eloquence to Gordon's affecting melodies, in the first song evoking the desolation of 'the little wooden house', over delicate textures, that image returning in the fourth song, echoing a Yiddish folk song. Especially arresting was the second poem about being 'summoned by silence', citing a Polish phrase uttered by Gordon's father. The excitement of reaching the house and the forest memorial is evoked in the intensifying rhythms and string solos, until the final song asks 'can your shadows come to rest?', sustained vocal lines heard against the final wisps of a sobbing string motif that had permeated the texture since the start. *A Kind of Haunting* is a haunting musical essay surrounding Marion Hirsch's concept of 'post-memory'; of particular significance to Jewish listeners it is sure to be of relevance and appeal to a universal audience.

A Kind of Haunting is now available on BBC Sounds.
Malcolm Miller

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OBITUARIES –



Bob in Hanover, aged 3

Bob né Rudolf (Rudi) KIRCHHEIMER

Born: 19 May 1925, Hanover

Died: 3 December 1924, London

Bob and Ann, Ann and Bob; they were really one, they hardly went places without each other, they led a totally shared history of coming here via the Kindertransport and never seeing their respective parents again. Their partnership future together. Once nicknamed 'the Duracell bunnies' for their boundless, smiling enthusiasm, Bob and Ann

Although small in stature Bob was a man who made an enormous impact.

The fourth and youngest child of Joseph and Hedwig, Bob had an extraordinary life and overcame so much, building a life with family at its centre.

He never spoke much about his family life in Germany except to say there was not a lot of fun or laughter in the home. His Barmitzva, in May 1938, was one of the last to take place in the Great Synagogue of Hanover before it was destroyed on Kristallnacht. Just a year later his parents took the extraordinarily courageous step of sending him to London.

He arrived at Liverpool Street a few days before his 14th birthday, and in those first few months he moved between several families and hostels. In September 1939 he was evacuated with the Hampstead Parochial School to Whipsnade, where he stayed until his 16th birthday, working on the farm and helping to teach the younger children. He often spoke fondly of this time.

His first job, age 16, was for an optical instrument manufacturer in East London, making lenses. He then joined the Home Guard in Glasgow, where he was ordered to change his name. As part of the Royal Artillery, in 1945 he was posted to a POW camp in Yorkshire as an interpreter.

Demobbed in 1948, Bob became a manager in an electroplating works and joined a club for young refugees, run by Bloomsbury House. There he met the gorgeous Hannah Kuhn – a little fiery redhead – and they were married in May 1950 under the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (LJS), a community that was to be central to their entire lives.

In 1951 Dad became an accountant for an oil company in London and was finally able to resume the education that had been so badly disrupted. In 1960, after studying in the evenings and by correspondence course, he

qualified as a Chartered Secretary.

In 1968 he joined textile distributor Boyriven as Company Secretary and Chief Accountant, becoming Finance Director in 1974. By coincidence his father's business in Hannover was also a textile distributor. He finally retired in 2005, aged 80 after 37 years of very happy and successful employment.

His live revolved around his family. He adored Ann right up to the end, and was a wonderful father to their two sons, David and Andy. He was over the moon when three grandchildren came along and, subsequently, warmly embraced their life partners and delighted in his four great-grandchildren, the youngest of whom was born nine weeks before he passed.

Community was also incredibly important to Bob, be it the LJS, Liberal Judaism or Leo Baeck College. He worked tirelessly for them all and he didn't mind what the role was.

During the 1990s both Bob and Ann became increasingly devoted to Holocaust education for all ages. Bob never refused a speaking opportunity, it became a personal mission to honour his parents' memory.

His unwavering dedication to ensure future generations never forget the tragedy of the Shoah was truly remarkable, and he also enjoyed his own studies of Torah and Hebrew. His role as keeper of the Scrolls at the LJS gave him enormous pride and pleasure.

Bob had a zest for life, and was industrious, kind and wise. Softly spoken, he was modest about himself and always thoughtful and tolerant of others. He loved to meet people, and took great energy from those younger than himself. Everything he did was with compassion, integrity and honesty. He loved to travel, especially to Italy and the South of France, and even at the age of 93 was able to give precise directions to a taxi driver in Hanover and show us the exact location of his father's favourite café.



Ann and Bob on their wedding day in May 1951



Ann and Bob with sons David and Andy in the garden of their Neasden home in 1957



Hannah (Ann) with her parents in Konigsburg, in 1930



Bob & Ann pictured last summer at Ann's 96th birthday party, with David & Jennie, their three grandchildren and three of their now four great-grandchildren

BOB & ANN KIRK

Ann (née Hannah) KUHN

Born: 15 August 1928, Berlin

Died: 23 January 2025, London



The last photo Ann had of herself with her mother, taken shortly before she travelled by Kindertransport

interdependent, mutually exclusive life together for 74 years. They had a very deep love for each other, born out of a gave them enormous strength ... not to forget the past, but to cope with it constructively, and to build a solid and bright died within seven weeks of one another. Here are their respective obituaries, written by their son David Kirk.

Ann welcomed everyone with a warm smile, even making a stranger feel welcome.

Ann was the only child of Franz and Hertha. Her father was a doctor, as was his father, while her mother had a business degree and career, unusual for those times.

Ann talked with huge affection about her early years in Germany, always referring to her parents as Mutti & Papa. She recalled being curled up on a shelf listening to her father play his cello or the piano, sometimes joining her parent's friends for a chamber music session, or being out at the weekend on the family's small boat on the River Rhine. Her paternal grandfather had a villa outside Breslau where she spent happy summers.

She described her parents as modern and assimilated, her father not being religious, but her Mum more so and taking her to an Orthodox Synagogue. She always treasured her paternal grandmother's Reform Siddur, amused with the idea that her grandmother had been an early Progressive Jew.

With Nazi oppression worsening, her parents decided to send her to the UK. Ann left Germany on the SS *Manhattan* in April 1939, aged just 10.

Her arrival in the UK was sponsored by sisters Millie and Sophie Levy, who were both unmarried and independently comfortable. They lived in Apsley House, just around the corner from the LJS, where they took her for her first UK shabbat and which she always described as her "other home".

Having arrived in London on our late Queen's birthday, she adopted the date as her own unofficial English birthday too. She

loved the monarchy and all they stood for, believing they moderated extremism.

The Levy sisters, who are still known by the whole Kirk family as 'The Aunts', provided Ann with a lovely home, affection, a wonderful education at South Hampstead High, and a new beginning. They encouraged the diminutive redhead to develop a strong mind of her own.

Ann always threw herself whole heartedly into whatever she was doing. She was hardworking, conscientious, and completely trustworthy, something borne out in all her South Hampstead School reports.

She was resilient, courageous and gutsy, never more so than when she was hit by a coach pulling out of Victoria bus station in 1985. After months in hospital she insisted on walking unaided to meet her first grandchild.

She was a great teacher to her own and other people's children, teaching Grade 2 at Cheder for years. She loved being in the thick of it, whether at the Women's Society, Peggy Lang House, Tuesday luncheon club, the Community Care Group and numerous fund raising bazaars. She supported Bob in all his community activities and personally helped found the LJS choir.

Professionally she was a technical editor, working for many years for Heinemann Medical, editing huge tomes on urology and antibiotics. She used those skills as editor of the shul newsletter and the LJS quarterly magazine, *Pointer*, and also the two Liberal Judaism prayer books that are in use today.

She somehow managed to balance her career with raising her family, organising wonderful picnics. She adored all the Jewish festivals and loved being

surrounded by her extended family. She was a wonderful host; she loved a party and any opportunity to sing or dance.

When their granddaughter Devora reached 10, the age Ann had been when she left Germany, Ann and Bob began telling their own stories. They made a great double act, with Ann sharing a very personal story and Bob more the history. They devoted the last 30 years of their lives to Holocaust education.

In the early 1990's Ann discovered long lost cousins in both Israel and the US. Finding family who had actually known her parents was a huge source of comfort to her.

Ann's last few years were beset by ill health, and she spent her final year at Riverside Lodge Care Home where she was beautifully looked after. Her passing in the same week as the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz seemed all the more poignant.

Ann's last message from her father, written in June 1942, a year before he was murdered at Auschwitz, was "Be happy, live your life to the full, always tell the truth, and do not grieve". She lived by and often repeated these words, becoming a true Eishet Chayil – a woman of valour, of strength of mind and spirit, of being the rock that held the family together.

Ann & Bob Kirk both received BEMs in 2019 for their contribution to Holocaust Education. They were predeceased by son Andy, but are survived by their son David, their daughter in law Jennie, their grandchildren Devora, Ben and Josh, and their great grandchildren Joseph, Sophie, Sebi and baby Isaac.

IN PERSON EVENTS

Please note to attend in person meetings you must contact the co-ordinator listed for exact times and venue.

DATE	TIME	GROUP	CO-ORDINATOR
Thursday 1 May	Afternoon	Pinner	Susan Harrod
Wednesday 7 May	Lunchtime	North London	Ros Hart
Monday 12 May	Afternoon	Hampstead, with Bob Sinfield talking about The Iron Curtain Call	Ros Hart
Tuesday 13 May	Morning	Ealing	Ros Hart
Tuesday 13 May	Afternoon	Manchester	Michal Mocton
Wednesday 14 May	Afternoon	Radlett	Ros Hart
Thursday 15 May	Lunchtime	Kinder Lunch	Susan Harrod
Monday 19 May	Afternoon	Enfield	Ros Hart
Tuesday 20 May	All Day	Ramble	Karen Diamond/ Ros Hart
Wednesday 21 May	All Day	Scotland Regional (see advert on page 4)	Agnes Isaacs
Wednesday 21 May	Morning	Golders Green, with blogger Jayne Wynick	Ros Hart
Tuesday 27 May	Morning	Central London	Karen Diamond
Tuesday 27 May	Afternoon	Leeds	Michal Mocton
Thursday 29 May	Lunchtime	Oxford	Karen Diamond

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ZOOMS AHEAD

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

Monday 12 May @ 4pm	Larry Tye, author – <i>The Forger of Paris: Adolfo Kaminsky and Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust</i> https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/83241841235	Meeting ID: 832 4184 1235
Tuesday 13 May @ 4pm	Rachel Kolsky – From Bagels to Bhajis, an illustrated tour of the East End of London https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/85126223339	Meeting ID: 8512 622 3339
Monday 19 May @ 4pm	Eleanor Thom – Researching, reimagining and laying Stolpersteine for my grandmother's loved ones https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/85324879339	Meeting ID: 853 2487 9339
Wednesday 21 May @ 4pm	Book Discussion (no speaker) – <i>People of the Book</i> by Geraldine Brooks https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/88686925101	Meeting ID: 8868 692 5101
Wednesday 28 May @ 4pm	Lyna Panas - Behind the Scenes of the Charedi Schools https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/86055191640	Meeting ID: 8605 519 1640

KEEP FIT WITH AJR

All AJR members & friends are invited to take part in these online classes.

Every Mon @ 10.30am
Get Fit where you Sit (seated yoga)
<https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/85246889439>
Meeting ID: 8524 688 9439

Every Tues @ 11.00am
Shelley's Exercise class
<https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/88466945622>
Meeting ID: 884 6694 5622

AJR
AJ RAMBLERS CLUB

Our next walk will take place on:
TUESDAY 20 MAY 2025 at 11am

Meeting at a London underground station

There is no charge to come for a ramble. There will be a couple of comfort stops and an opportunity to have a coffee/sandwich break.

karendiamond@ajr.org.uk

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THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025
11AM-12.30PM

£3 each or £5 per pair to cover Kosher refreshments

All welcome but booking is essential!

julia@ajr.org.uk / caryn@ajr.org.uk



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