



## A service to commemorate service



Hedi Argent MBE lit one of six memorial candles during our Kristallnacht service, overlooked by Rabbi Jonathan Witternberg, Bernhard Wrabetz, Ambassador of the Republic of Austria, Tulip Siddiq MP, Jennifer Brunton from ORT and some of Hedi's fellow first generation Members of the AJR.

### On 11 November the AJR held our annual Kristallnacht Commemoration at Belsize Square Synagogue.

It was particularly special this year because Rabbi Witternberg presided over the service for the last time in his guise as Senior Rabbi of the New North London Synagogue. You can read our tribute to Jonathan, who retires this month, on page 11.

It was a special service for another reason. We heard from Jennifer Brunton, the World ORT Archivist, about ORT's role in helping Jews during and after the Holocaust. AJR 2G member Monica Lowenberg then movingly described how ORT saved the life of her father, Ernst Lowenberg, one of 106 boys rescued through ORT Berlin's final transport in 1939.

Kristallnacht and World ORT are connected by World ORT's efforts to

provide vocational training and aid to Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, helping them to emigrate and rebuild their lives after the pogrom.

ORT, which stands for the Organisation for Rehabilitation through Training, is a global education network driven by Jewish values. Founded in Russia in 1880, its headquarters moved to Berlin in 1921, after the Bolshevik Revolution. Initially, the Berlin office dealt mainly with fundraising and support for Jewish education in other countries where the Jews were less well-off. When the Nazis rose to power in 1933, and Jewish children were expelled from German schools, ORT sought to open a school in Berlin, but encountered difficulties due to the ban on selling property to Jews. Using its

*Continued on page 2*

### BUSY TIMES

Last month was extraordinarily busy for the AJR. We celebrated the anniversaries of two contrasting historic events that shaped the lives of the Jewish refugees. One, Kristallnacht, was the seminal turning point in the history of the Holocaust. The second was a fund created by Jewish refugees in heartfelt gratitude to this country for granting them sanctuary during the darkest years of Nazi persecution. You can read reports of both these events within these pages.

We also held a very successful two-day conference, *Remembering & Rethinking: Teaching & Learning about the Holocaust*, during which we brought together over 150 leading experts and stakeholders to shape the future of Holocaust education together. Look out for a full report in next month's issue.

Next month we will also be marking the *AJR Journal's* own 80th anniversary. We would welcome any contributions to this.

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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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## A service to commemorate service (cont.)

international ties, the British branch of ORT purchased a school building and dormitory in Berlin.

In April 1937, Adolf Eichmann, then the Nazi Security Police official in charge of Jewish emigration, signed a letter authorising the opening of a World ORT school in Berlin. The aim of the school was to provide technical education for Jewish schoolboys who had been excluded from schools by the Nazis, on the basis that they would then emigrate. Because of the increasingly precarious position of Jews in Nazi Germany, ownership of the school buildings and equipment was registered under British ORT (today's ORT UK).

The main part of the school was divided into six departments: locksmiths, blacksmiths, plumbers, electricians, mechanics and welders. With so many Jewish professionals and academics being made unemployed by the Nazi regime, the school was able to attract the best in the field to serve as teachers. These included Professor Rupert, formerly Head of a State Technical Institute in Germany; Mr Friedrich Heilborn who, prior to the Nazis coming to power, had worked as an advisor to the State Patent Office, and Civ. Engineer Wiener, one of the chief engineers of the General Electric Corporation in Germany. The school's board was headed by Civ. Eng. Behrend.

By July 1938, over 200 boys aged between 14-17 from all over northern Germany were studying at the school. Four months later, on Kristallnacht, the ORT Berlin school was one of the few Jewish institutions in the city left untouched. According to a December 1938 report submitted by I. Korálnik, General Secretary of the Central Executive of the ORT Union: "I found the personnel of the Executive of our Berlin Committee intact. By a miracle, none of them was sent to a concentration camp during the mass arrests which took place in Berlin during the last few weeks [ie after Kristallnacht]. None of them spent a night at home during that period for fear of falling into the hands of the Gestapo."

In a later report, entitled 'The Financing of the Work of the ORT Union in 1939', an administrator wrote: "After the demolition of the Jewish trade schools and retraining institutions during the tragic events of the first half of November 1938, our

Berlin School, as one standing under the protection of a British organisation (British ORT Society), is the only Jewish institution of vocational training in Germany which continues its work without interruption and with an intact equipment [sic]. It must be therefore anticipated that the afflux [sic] of new pupils will considerably exceed the high figures of the preceding school years."

As war approached, British ORT arranged to transfer the Berlin school to England. The British Ministry of Labour and the Home Office both agreed to the move on the understanding that the school be set up in Leeds, and that the equipment from Berlin be sent with the boys and staff. Unfortunately, the German authorities did not allow for the equipment to be exported, causing delays to the scheme. As time was running out and war seemed imminent, British ORT's Lt. Col. Henry Levey persuaded the British government to allow the transfer without the equipment.

Former student Hans Futter later recalled the final days in Berlin before the move to England: "German passports had to be obtained from Gestapo headquarters and had to be stamped with English visas. The English visas could only be stamped at the last moment. The emigration department to all intents and purposes had closed down... We did not know from one day to the next if we would be able to leave Germany or not... Our goodbyes to our parents came rather suddenly in the end. Things moved very fast during these days... We were very young and the immediate future seemed very exciting. Our parents were very distressed indeed. They realized that our goodbyes would probably be for ever..."

Another survivor from the Berlin ORT School was Ernst Lowenberg. In a deeply moving tribute delivered during AJR's Kristallnacht service, his daughter Monica shared her father's experience. The son of a Jewish factory owner, Ernst was just fifteen when he arrived at the ORT School. He was one of 106 boys between the ages of 15-17, with eight teachers and their families, who left Berlin for England on 27 August 1939. It was one of the last transports out of Nazi Germany.

A second transfer for the remaining 100 or so ORT boys and the school's director, Dr. Werner Simon, was planned for 3 September. Sadly, war broke out that very day and most of this group died in Auschwitz.



An ORT certificate of professional training in corsetterie (embroidery), given to Holocaust survivor Toni Ermann in Geneva in 1945

Monica ended her tribute with these beautiful words about her father: "Even though my father had gone through terrible life experiences, he was nevertheless a compassionate, rational and level-headed man. A man I was blessed to know and love. A man who had retained a twinkle in his eye even though everything he had known had been destroyed.

"He taught me how to remain calm when all around is not, he taught me to accept difference and to make conclusions using facts and reason and encouraged me in all of my educational endeavours no matter how small or grand. He taught me to laugh and crack jokes in times of adversity and to always try to find the time to offer a listening ear without any need to comment but simply listen. He taught me how to manage my accounts and run my business, the beauty in keeping one's affairs in order and fighting for what is right and not giving up at the first hurdle. He taught me to move with the times but to not lose oneself in the process. He taught me that love does not consider race, religion, identity, achievements, failures, for it simply loves.

I am certain that much of these things, if not all, he learnt at ORT."

After the war, ORT trained tens of thousands of survivors and displaced persons from Jewish communities throughout Europe. Many ORT graduates contributed to the building of the early Jewish community of Palestine.

Today ORT, which celebrated its 145th birthday this year, runs an international network of schools, colleges, vocational training programs, and other activities benefitting more than 350,000 people – young and old, Jewish and non-Jewish – in more than 40 countries.

**David Herman**

# SIXTY YEARS OF THANKS

The British Academy, in partnership with the AJR, hosted a special conference on Monday 10 November to celebrate 60 years of the Thank Offering to Britain Fellowship – a landmark fund established by Jewish refugees to express their gratitude to the British people for offering sanctuary during the Nazi era.

Held at the British Academy's historic home on Carlton House Terrace in

London, the event brought together former Fellows, academics, descendants of refugees, and representatives from the AJR and the British Academy. The day featured a series of discussions, lectures, and reflections, honouring the legacy of the Fellowship and the Jewish refugee community whose generosity made it possible.

For six decades, the Fellowship has supported research into "human studies widely interpreted and their bearing on the well-being of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom." It has funded scholars across disciplines ranging from human rights to the arts, philosophy, and history – including several who have gone on to become Fellows of the British Academy.



Hetan Shah, CEO of the British Academy, speaking at the event

Opening the day, Hetan Shah, Chief Executive of the British Academy, reflected on the enduring significance of the Fellowship as "a living testament to the power of gratitude and knowledge to shape a better society."

Michael Newman, AJR Chief Executive, said: "The Thank Offering to Britain Fellowship remains one of the most meaningful expressions of gratitude ever made by a refugee community and one the AJR continues to be immensely proud of. Sixty years on, we honour both the generosity of the refugees who contributed to it and the scholarship it continues to inspire."

## HONOURING THE BELSEN BOYS OF ASCOT

We are grateful to Jewish Care's Stephen Ison for sharing this report of a commemorative event in Ascot for young Holocaust survivors.

On Sunday 2 November I attended a deeply moving event in Ascot commemorating the remarkable support given to 35 young survivors who found refuge there after WW2.

The event, organised by Sunninghill & Ascot Parish Council, marked the unveiling of a plaque to be fixed onto a house opposite Ascot Racecourse which housed a group of orphaned young men who, having survived the horrors of Bergen-Belsen, were brought to Britain in 1945 as part of the first group of child survivors to arrive from the liberated camps.


The ceremony included heartfelt speeches, and the unveiling of the blue plaque by survivor Ivor Perl, who lived in Ascot as a teenager in 1945. His participation brought the story full circle, linking the enduring legacy of the



"Belsen Boys" with the ongoing work of Jewish Care's Holocaust Survivors' Centre.

An accompanying booklet tells a powerful story of how the Ascot community opened its arms to these young survivors, helping them rebuild their lives after unimaginable trauma.

A thankyou to Sunninghill & Ascot Parish Council, particularly Cllr Allison Sharpe and Olivia Marsden, for their thoughtful organisation of this commemorative event – a lasting tribute to compassion in the face of history's darkest times.



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# FROM A PAINTING TO A PLAQUE

The restitution of a painting to its rightful home in Berlin led to the installation of a plaque nearby for a prominent psychoanalyst who, like many thousands of fellow Jews, was forced to flee from Nazi persecution. John Staub shares the story.

In October 2024, several members of my family attended the Berlin Jewish Museum for the unveiling of the painting *Jazzband* by Max Oppenheimer (MOPP), which had once belonged to my grandfather, Hugo Staub, in Berlin. The event was featured in the *AJR Journal* in December 2024.

Hugo Staub was a lawyer and psychoanalyst who was heavily influenced by and met with Sigmund Freud before being forced to leave Germany for France in March 1933. For several years Staub divided his time between France and England. In London he worked with juvenile delinquents at the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency, and was a member of the British Psychoanalytic Association and the British Society for Medical Psychology.

Dr. Staub was serving in the French Army at the time of that country's surrender to Hitler. Found by the International Red Cross in Vichy, Dr. Staub was escorted to the Spanish border and eventually reached the United States where he made his mark in working with juvenile delinquency problems. With Franz Alexander, Dr. Staub was co-author of *The Criminal, the Judge and the Public*, and he also wrote many papers on criminal psychology, juvenile delinquency and related subjects.

During a jazz concert held the evening after the *Jazzband* unveiling, I was approached

by Dr Ludger Hermanns of the Berlin Psychoanalytical Society, regarding the possibility of erecting a plaque to Hugo at one of the addresses where he lived before escaping Germany in 1933. The Society had already established several similar plaques as part of a series entitled "mit Freud in Berlin."

Working in partnership with another psychoanalyst, Dr Regine Lockot, Ludger had researched Hugo's life and history extensively and he suggested erecting a plaque at Fasanenstr. 13, Charlottenburg, where Hugo had lived between 1915 and 1919. This beautiful building was built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and occupied mostly by writers and artists. Unlike many other buildings, it is still in its original condition, having survived the war unscathed. Its pristine condition contrasts sharply with much of graffiti-strewn Berlin. The current residents willingly approved the memorial.

My cousin Duncan came from New York with his wife and daughter. Sidney, a more distant relative, came from France together with his wife. Unfortunately, Hugo's three other grandchildren did not manage to attend.

Speeches were made by the current head of the Psychoanalytical Society, the Chair of the Residents' Association and Dr Regine Lockot, who gave a detailed



The commemorative plaque that has been installed for Hugo Staub



Dr Ludger Hermanns and Dr Regine Lockot

and moving speech outlining Hugo's life and professional contribution.

At the end of the speeches, the plaque was unveiled by Duncan's daughter Kaia, the youngest descendent of Hugo present at the event.

The whole event – together with the very professional, pleasant and sensitive way in which it was handled at every turn – informed us more about Hugo and his life and created a very special memory for all of our family.



Unlike much of Berlin, the building where Hugo Staub lived remains in pristine condition



Members of the Staub family assembled in Berlin for the plaque unveiling

# MOST ITEMS CAN NEVER BE RETURNED



Helen Davy & Kathi Mayrhofer sitting at the looted table



Richard Aronowitz, Anne Webber, Matthias Weininger, Michael Newman

**At the end of October the AJR held a moving event in partnership with JW3 in London, where we heard fascinating personal stories of returned items stolen from Jewish families in Nazi occupied Europe, and reflected on the emotional and cultural impact of looted objects.**

The evening took inspiration from the story of 'The Table,' an art project born from coincidences and discovery. In Austria, a granddaughter, Kathi Mayrhofer, stumbled upon an ornate dining table hidden in her family's attic that was clearly very different to the rest of their furniture. When she questioned its origins, she uncovered a dark truth: her family had acquired it through Nazi looting. Determined to make amends, she researched its rightful owners and connected with a family in England. The families linked further when she

met the original owner's granddaughter, Helen Davy, also an art student in Vienna. Together, they restored the table and turned it into a powerful symbol – a place for honest conversations.

At our event, we used Kathi's actual table as a springboard for discussions, personal stories, and presentations on the emotional and cultural impact of stolen objects, a place to explore the painful legacy of loss – not just of material value, but of lives, memories, and cultures.

Pál Hermann was a Hungarian virtuoso cellist and composer murdered by the Nazis for being Jewish. During our event the historian Dr Kate Kennedy, herself a cellist, spoke of the emotional impact of the reunion of Pál Hermann's Galliano cello with his 92-year old daughter and grandson. The cello is now owned by a young Australian student who last January accompanied the instrument across the world to play Hermann's composition at a European Parliament ceremony for International Holocaust Memorial Day. The story is told in

Kennedy's book, *Cello – A Journey Through Silence to Sound*.

Silverware archivist from Munich, Matthias Weniger, who works to return looted pieces to Jewish families, described his work as "a moral obligation" and the joy that is experienced when returned items, such as candlesticks and kiddush cups, are used again. Of course, it's not all happy endings; as Matthias discussed with AJR Trustee Janet Lew, most items will never be returned.

The event ended with a panel of restitution experts chaired by AJR Chief Executive, Michael Newman, and including Richard Aronowitz, head of provenance at Christies, and Anne Webber of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe (CLAE). Together they highlighted the difficulties around restitution, and the historic unwillingness to return belongings, as well as the occasional success.

**Debra Barnes**



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# 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. Please address any letters to [editorial@ajr.org.uk](mailto:editorial@ajr.org.uk).

## HELEN ROSENAU

Your Spotlight on Helen Rosenau (November) brought back happy memories of being taught by her at the Leo Baeck Rabbinic College. Having just completed a science degree I entered the College in 1965 to find that almost all of the staff were continental refugees. The principal and founder was Rabbi Dr Werner Van Der Zyl; Rabbis Teicher Gertner, Maybaum, Gryn and Rayner taught the various rabbinic texts and skills... and Helen Rosenau did a term on Jewish Art. I recall her taking us to the British Museum to see artefacts connected to the Hebrew Bible and her lessons were light relief to the more serious rabbinic subjects. Sixty years later, I realise how fortunate I was to have been taught by these inspiring emigrés, a link to the great pre-war rabbinic seminaries.  
*Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein, The Ark Synagogue, Northwood*

## HISTORY DEMANDS EMPATHY

Your publication of Chaja Polak's thoughts (October) filled me with hope. The simple hope that it is not heretical to feel empathy for the thousands of Gazan women, children and civilian fathers who have been, just as our forebears were, deprived of food, water, and homes at the point of a gun. You are a better journal for allowing the oxygen of Jewish sympathy and humanity for ordinary Gazans to be included in your printed pages. Although the purpose of the AJR is to represent the community of Jews who found succour on these shores (of which my family is one) by returning to Holocaust accounts, you cannot expect events in Israel not to be discussed; especially when some English Jews have portrayed Israel as their spiritual home even when it has not been their geographical one. The ever-present sufferings of Gazans should be heard, as human kindness has no nationality.  
*Anthony Lipmann, Bridgewater*

## BUNCE COURT

I found the article by David Herman about refugee schools (September) very moving, and the accompanying essay by Alex Maws matches my knowledge of Bunce Court.

My late half-sister and brother came to

England in September 1934 with our father, and were promptly enrolled in New Herrlingen School (the formal name of Bunce Court). My brother left after two years, but my sister was there from the age of nine to 15 until they were both evacuated to join their mother in California in the summer of 1940. Her private memoir reveals that they were the only students there who had even one parent in England, and that "...Bunce Court was an attempt to create a utopian community, and it was here that I found myself and my political and moral values. It was a community which was built and invented and lived every day of the week. We all together shared the wealth, and we worked for the good of all... We learned about the importance of having a community and of being a member of one.

"From that we learned about the value of sharing and giving, of the needs of the group and of the need to be alone.... This school was a huge piece of my childhood: it was both school and home.... The two-fold purpose was always to make the children feel that human life was of utmost importance, even though external reality did not mirror that faith, and that the cultural background from which they had come was worth cultivating, even though they had all been removed from their natural habitat."

Fifty years after leaving Bunce Court, my sister and brother attended a reunion at the school's original location, Herrlingen, near Ulm. Anna Essinger was a truly progressive educator, and the school made a huge difference in the lives of a great many refugee children.

*James Zetzel, New York*

## KRISTALLNACHT

The AJR and others frequently refer to 9 November as being the anniversary of Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass). This is clearly a euphemism, as the 1938 event involved so much more than the breaking of windows and the shattering of glass. Maybe this was the name Germany gave this date in the immediate post-War years, before it accepted full responsibility for the horrors enacted on this day. A more fitting designation for this date might be 'Day of the

Nazi Pogrom' or 'November Pogrom Day'.

Yet, it probably remains a day of mixed emotions in Germany: 9 November happens also to be the date when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, leading to the reunification of Germany, an event Germans are more likely to mark as an anniversary to celebrate.

*David Wirth, London SE21*

## LOOKING FOR?

### MEMORIES FROM THE COLONIES

Dr Eliana Hadjisavvas, Lecturer in History at Birkbeck, University of London, is searching for anyone who has unpublished memories of 'enemy alien' internment camps in the colonies for a forthcoming exhibition at the Wiener Holocaust Library.

Scheduled to open next year, the 'How Britain came to intern Jewish refugees throughout the British Empire' exhibition will focus on the experiences of Jewish refugees throughout the British Empire, from the Middle East to Sub-Saharan Africa. During the interwar and wartime period, territories ranging from Mauritius to Kenya and Tanzania, became sites of refuge for thousands of European Jews.

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### THE CAMPAIGN FOR SOVIET JEWRY

Avram Taylor is a Lecturer in History at Northumbria University in Newcastle. He is currently researching the support offered by Jews in the UK towards Jews in the Soviet Union from the 1960s onwards. He is looking for anyone who was active in any aspect of it in Glasgow, London or Manchester, especially those involved in the '35s, who campaigned for women's equal rights and an end to antisemitism in the Soviet Union.

[avram.taylor@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:avram.taylor@northumbria.ac.uk)

# Remembering Kristallnacht



As the photo on page 1 shows, the AJR recently commemorated the 87th anniversary of Kristallnacht with a poignant service of remembrance. We also generated some impressive media coverage.

For example, we arranged for the *Daily Mirror* to interview AJR member Inge Gerschfield. In the resultant double page spread, published on Saturday 8 November, the now 97-year-old “remembers every horrifying detail of Kristallnacht”, including that her father had to go into hiding afterwards, leaving the family without an income. They were among the thousands of German Jews who were helped by Frank Foley to eventually secure British visas; sadly not all of Inge’s extended family were so lucky.

Inge also told the *Daily Mirror* how just weeks after Hitler came to power, in March 1933, her parents had to flee from their brand new department store

in Seigburg in the Rhineland, before it even opened, after Nazi stormtroopers barricaded the door with placards saying ‘kauf nicht von Juden’ – don’t buy from Jews. It would be three years before Inge, who stayed behind with relatives, saw her parents again.

Similarly terrifying memories were shared during our Kristallnacht service by Inge’s fellow AJR member Hedi Argent MBE, who came here as a child refugee with her parents. She told the assembled guests that: “I watched the violence of Kristallnacht from a window in Vienna. My father had already been arrested and forced to scrub the streets; our home and everything we knew was taken from us. We left Austria with nothing, leaving behind the family we would never see again. Britain gave us safety and a chance to rebuild but the memories of those we lost have never left me.”

The service brought together AJR members from across the generations, along with representatives from partner organisations, embassies, and government departments. Distinguished guests included His Excellency the

Austrian Ambassador Bernhard Wrabetz, Tulip Siddiq MP, diplomats from the Austrian, German, and Israeli embassies, and representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Opening the service, the AJR’s Michael Newman said: “Kristallnacht reminds us how quickly hatred can escalate when prejudice goes unchallenged. The AJR exists to ensure that the stories of our members – the last survivors and refugees of Nazi persecution – are never forgotten, and that their legacy continues to guide future generations towards tolerance and understanding.”

## SWITCH ON ELECTRICS

Rewires and all household electrical work

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The AJR group in front of a tribute to Sir Nicholas Winton in the street recently renamed in his honour, close to Bubney station

<https://ajr.org.uk/latest-news/prague-names-a-street-in-honour-of-sir-nicholas-winton/>



# Proud to be in Prague

**In October a group of Czech descendants joined the AJR on a fascinating heritage trip to Prague. Debra Barnes reports.**

The trip was created as an opportunity to explore our roots and learn more about the long, rich but often difficult Jewish past of beautiful Prague. A history marked by periods of cultural flourishing, severe persecution, near-decimation during the Holocaust, and a complex rebuilding under communism and in the modern era.

In the early 1930s, the Jewish community numbered around 35,000. With the rise of Hitler an influx of refugees from Germany and Austria boosted the Jewish population to over 92,000 but there was little in terms of refuge after the Nazi occupation in March 1939. Between October 1941 and March 1945, at least 46,067 Jews were deported from Prague. Most were sent first to the Theresienstadt Ghetto (Terezín), a fortress town north of Prague that served as a transit camp and a place to either die from starvation and disease, or to be transported to

extermination camps, primarily Auschwitz-Birkenau. Around 80,000 Jews from the Bohemian and Moravian lands were murdered in the Holocaust. Only 7,540 of the Jews in Prague at the start of deportations survived.

Many in our group had family members who had been sent to Terezín (the Czech name used today rather than the German moniker of Theresienstadt) and so our visit there was stark. It was incredible to

**“ The weekend proved to be a weekend of such highs with genuinely warm people and the lows of learning about such misery and treachery, particularly during WWII. You can read about it, but you don’t understand until you are confronted with the stark evidence. ”**

**DEBORAH GRABINER**

walk around the town, not exactly *thriving* (unsurprisingly, property is well below the prices of Prague, which have inflated in recent years due to the demand for Airbnb rentals) but certainly surviving and actually very beautiful, with a picturesque town

square of pastel-coloured magnificent buildings. And then it all made sense when we learnt this was the location of the grotesque façade put on by the Nazis for the Red Cross inspection in May 1944. Flowers and grass were planted; fake shops, schools and cafes were built, and cultural performances were put on to give the impression of the well-being of the prisoners.

One of our party, Toni Bright, said, “I would never have visited Terezin by myself. Going with a group of people, each with a different family history but with a common theme, was both comforting and made the experience less dreadful, although trying to imagine the ghetto was beyond me, which perhaps was a good thing. By chance, finding a school photograph of my father in the museum, standing by the train tracks and viewing the art collection was very moving.”

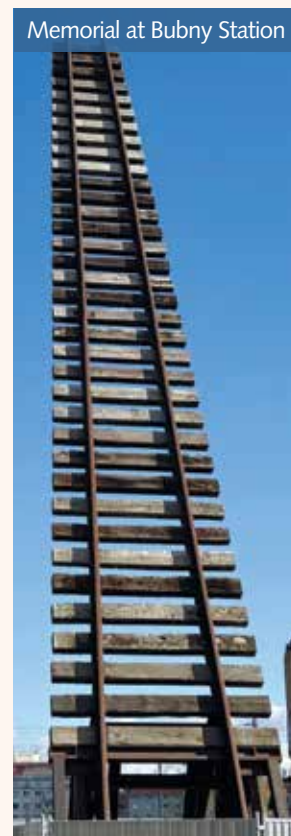
The sun came out for our walking tour of the memorials and tributes to Sir Nicholas Winton, who helped to rescue over 600 mainly Jewish children from Prague, two of whom were represented in our group by their descendants. Sarah Beck said, “As the daughter of a Winton child, seeing the memorials in Prague



The Jerusalem Synagogue Prague



Winton descendants at Prague Main Station memorial



Memorial at Bubny Station

Central Station where my father last saw his parents was particularly moving. It means a great deal to know that Nicholas Winton and his colleagues continued to be revered in the Czech Republic for their actions in saving hundreds of children from the Nazis, including my father."

Our guide, Jiří Klůc, expertly brought many other stories and sights to life with his knowledge, such as Operation Anthropoid, the assassination by the Czechoslovak resistance of Reinhard Heydrich, a top-ranking Nazi and principal architect of the Holocaust. We also learnt how the 1948 Communist takeover further stifled Jewish life and brought state-sponsored antisemitism to the nation. As Mandy Gutwin said, "Jiří was so knowledgeable, and we can't thank him enough for sharing so many stories that brought the history to life."

Among the many insights shared by Jiří was that the Czech Republic was among the first nations to pledge support for Israel in its fight against Hamas following 7 October 2023. Many modern-day Czech Jews believe they are safer in the Republic than in other countries.

As part of our programme we were honoured to be invited to tea with

the British Ambassador, Matthew Field, to whom we presented Joanna Millan and Tommy Gutwin's My Story books. Joanna and her mother were in Theresienstadt, while Tommy was a Winton child. Joanna's daughter, Mandy, and Tommy's son, Mark, happen to be married to each other and came on the trip with their son, Steven.

**" Apart from learning more about the Czech people, their heroes and history, Mark learned more about his father's journey to the UK on one of Nicholas Winton's trains and I learned more about Theresienstadt where my mother and her mother were deported in June 1943. It was both educational and extremely emotional to say the least, but we're so glad we went. "**

**MANDY & MARK GUTWIN**

The small local Jewish community were also very welcoming, and we attended the Friday night service before having Shabbat dinner with them. For some of our group, it was their first experience of attending a synagogue service, which

felt quite special, and was a timely introduction to the other synagogues we visited during our walking tour of the Jewish Quarter, including the Pinkas Synagogue where the names of the 80,000 victims are inscribed onto the interior walls. A few people in our group managed to find their relatives' names – yet another moving experience.

There were further new discoveries as AJR Kindertransport scholar in residence, Dr Amy Williams, continued her research at the Prague Archives and was able to present copies of the Winton lists to our two Winton descendants during the trip.

The success of our four-day trip was summed up nicely by Amanda Hellman: "We've been to Prague several times, however this tour revealed many new sights and historical facts to us brought to light by the wonderful Jiří and the excellent organisation by Debra. It was so lovely to meet such a warm, friendly group of people and I do hope we can meet many of you again."

We hope to repeat the trip in the future to allow more Czech descendants to attend.

# MEET JIM

**We are delighted to introduce our new Trustee, Jim Selman, pending his appointment at our Annual Election meeting on 9 December. As the AJR prepares for a new era, in which we can no longer rely on the first generation to tell their stories, Jim will be bringing us many invaluable insights gained from a highly successful career in International Marketing and Communications. He explains why he has decided to join us.**

My heritage comes through my father's side. They weren't refugees but Nana Esther and Grandpa Jack (Itzak) were both of Polish origin. Esther was born there and brought over as a baby by my great grandparents, and Jack was born in London. I didn't learn a huge amount about life in the old country but did get the opportunity to visit years later and look forward to an upcoming trip next year. Jack and Esther were loving, supportive and generous grandparents, who gave me the earliest memories of my Jewish identity. Memories that created a foundation of enormous pride and curiosity ever since.

I grew up in Mill Hill, lived in Manchester while at university and started professional life in Los Angeles, before moving back to London a decade later. While at Manchester, I studied the Holocaust under the brilliant Professor Norman Geras and wrote my final year dissertation on it. I remember being challenged and often overwhelmed by the subject matter but appreciated the depth of learning. Most important of all, it was as a young student that I began to understand the critical responsibility of retelling this history to others so that they may understand its true gravity, remember those who lost their lives, and to ensure that it never happens again.



Jim Selman, new Trustee

After school, it was media and culture that inspired the direction of my career, first in public relations (which was invented by the brilliant Jewish media expert Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud), before broadening out into marketing and communications. My professional life began in Hollywood which was exciting, energising and exhausting! I remain passionate about film, TV and the creative arts. Regardless of the constant changes in technology, no one can deny the power of storytelling. While it is an art, the way we communicate is critical to all people. It creates relationships and often connects people from diverse backgrounds. It enriches communities, entire countries, but it can also sow division.

My work has moved across industries, geographies and disciplines. I have opened films, launched products, supported non-profits, academic papers, concerts, sports events and managed through crises in most of the continents of the world. I have coached leaders in industries as diverse as technology, food and drink, property and healthcare. With each opportunity, the key to success has always been in the creation of compelling, authentic communications.

Throughout my travels around the world, it has always been fascinating to explore Jewish life, and its collective ongoing story. Whether it was wandering on the promenade in Tel Aviv, explaining

Jewish humour in a pub in Galway, visiting museums on Jewish life and the Holocaust across Europe, going to see the late Jackie Mason in New York, or attending Saturday service in Copenhagen. Telling our story is as beautiful, creative, illuminating and humorous as it is harrowing. And it remains a powerful driver of our community, all over the globe.

I first learned about the extraordinary work of AJR through an old family friend whose relative is a long time member. It was a few years later that my former colleague Gemma Blane, who oversees PR and marketing for AJR, posted an impressive amount of media coverage from HMD over *LinkedIn*. When Gemma mentioned that AJR was looking for new trustees, I was very excited to explore the opportunity.

The story of this organisation and its members is unique, and critical to its work. Capturing the testimony of those who bore witness to the crimes of Nazi oppression is not only central to appropriately remembering the first generation of our refugees and survivors, but is integral to the education of subsequent generations, as well as the foundation for the community that AJR has developed over the years. I look forward to working with all our members as AJR continues to be an important focal point for this growing community.

# ON RABBI JONATHAN'S RETIREMENT

David Herman reflects on the career and contribution of a leading figure in contemporary Judaism.

Next month the AJR Journal will be celebrating its 80th anniversary. One member whose name has appeared in over 50 issues is Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, who has recently announced his retirement as Rabbi of the New North London Synagogue, where he has played a leading role in the development of the Masorti Movement.

Jonathan first featured in the Journal in December 1989, when he delivered the 12th Annual Rabbi Georg Salzberger lecture. Throughout his career with the Masorti movement he has worked closely with the AJR, as well as being one of our own most loved second generation members.

I first met Jonathan at Cambridge in the mid-1970s. What struck me immediately all those years ago was his extraordinary gentleness and intelligence. What I failed to realise then was his remarkable dedication, energy and his commitment to his faith and his community in North London. On my visits to his home, I have always been amazed by the constant phone calls from people in need. He managed to find time for them all.

Somehow, he has also managed to find time for his many public commitments, including presenting *Thought for the Day* on Radio 4 and often presiding over the AJR's annual *Kristallnacht* remembrance service at Belsize Square Synagogue. Then there is Jonathan's prolific writing over the past thirty years. Everyone will have their favourites among his books, whether his reflections on Judaism or his more personal books, *Walking with the Light: From Frankfurt to Finchley* (2013) and *My Dear Ones* (2016), the story of the correspondence between his great-grandmother and her six children after 1938.

*Walking With the Light* is about his walk from his synagogue in North-West London to his grandfather's synagogue in Frankfurt's West End. The synagogue, he writes, 'was the centre of my grandfather's rabbinical life for thirty years.' 'I stand here,' he writes in his Introduction, 'the child of a family who lost everything and began again in a new country, a Jew, a follower in my grandfather's footsteps, seventy-two years after he took his lonely leave of the synagogue shortly before his flight to England....' He quotes his grandfather's account of the synagogue after *Kristallnacht*: 'From the outside no sign of destruction could be seen... But inside, it offered a picture of terrifying devastation. The great candelabrum lay on the floor smashed into a thousand pieces. The benches, the lecterns, the pulpit where I had so often stood, the glorious organ, the cantor's prayer desk were all burnt. The Holy Ark was broken open; the Torah scrolls had been stolen.'

The book is about Jonathan's family but it is also an



extraordinary set of reflections on German-Jewish culture, from Moses Mendelssohn and *Nathan der Weise* to Franz Rosenzweig and the poet, Else Lasker-Schüler. The erudition is breathtaking but so is the quality of the writing. For example, this account of the fragments of the once-great culture which came to England with his family. 'On my desk,' he writes, 'sit the five volumes of my grandparents' edition of *Lessings Werke*, the collected works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,' printed in 1874. 'My grandparents could surely not have included them among the few precious possessions they were allowed to take, just one suitcase each, when they fled Germany in April 1939.... All through my childhood the volumes sat on my grandmother's shelves alongside the works of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Mörike, Schopenhauer, and the more recent poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke...'

Elsewhere, Rabbi Wittenberg beautifully evokes the lost world of German-Jewish refugees. 'Our grandparents' friends,' he writes, 'were almost all fellow refugees.... Their world was more Germany than London. As a child I just assumed that this was how one grew up.... I realised that what I had received was not a British but a refugee childhood in a small island of continental Europe set in North West London.'

The book moves between his grandparents' last months in Germany, the golden age of German-Jewish culture and his own journey back to modern-day Frankfurt and the reflections this inspired, about German Jews and the extraordinary culture that grew from this relationship. Everywhere there are fragments of the past and objects that bring the past to life: books, family letters, a wedding ring. There are few more beautifully written books about the relationship between the Jewish present and our past.

Rabbi Wittenberg's retirement will be a huge loss to his community at the New North London Synagogue. However, if it gives him more time to write that will be a great gain for all of us.

The newly discovered photo. Ustrzyki Dolne, Austro-Hungarian Empire



# Before tragedy

## Sarah Deech explains how a newly discovered family photo from 1920s Poland is bringing her closer to her ancestors.

A few months ago, a distant relative in the USA sent an email. He had found an old photo of my grandfather's family soon after WW1. It was taken outside their house, we presume, in the small town of Ustrzyki Dolne, in what is now far south-east Poland close to the Ukrainian and Slovakian borders.

I was completely mesmerised.

In some ways it is typical of the black and white photos to be found in

Jewish homes the world over: a family grouping from the early 20th century, in eastern European clothing, some looking classically Jewish, others more secular.

These photos haunt me. None of them know what is to come.

It is also a glimpse into a world I never knew, family I never met, relatives about whom I had heard stories my whole life, and a beloved grandfather in his youth.

There is a universality about it in other ways, too. This is one of millions of families whose lives would all eventually be destroyed by the Holocaust – whether by murder at the hands of the Nazis, or by escape to all corners of the globe.

When this photo was taken – early 1920s we think – it was a town where about half the residents were Jewish, the rest Polish and Ukrainian. And almost all the stories of 20th century Ashkenazi Jewish life can be found in this single photo.

One was rounded up by the Nazis as they invaded the village in 1942 and was sent to be murdered in a concentration camp, with her two young children. She was my great-aunt.

Another was taken by the Russian army and killed. His surviving family eventually settled in Israel.

Another fought with the Polish army during WW2 and eventually settled in Cardiff, where he had a family. His son went on to become the founder and director of the Campaign for the Freedom of Information.

Another two escaped to Brussels, where they married and lived for the rest of their lives. As a small child I clearly remember visiting them, practising my French and seeing my grandfather walk side by side with his brother, with their hands behind their backs in an identical manner. They looked like twins.

Another was the elderly Mayor of the town, who owned a small refinery nearby. The factory employed dozens of non-Jews from the local area and so he became a much respected and valued community figure. He was my great-grandfather.

And last but not least, second from left on the back row is my grandfather, Josef Asher Fraenkel.

Born in 1903, he moved to Vienna when still a teenager. Active in Zionist youth organisations at the University of Vienna, he





Sarah's mum and grandpa in Folkestone in 1946



Josef with Dora, holding Sarah's newborn mum in 1943



Josef, 1953



Sarah with her grandfather on his 75th birthday

was later barred from his law degree course because he was a Jew.

Eventually, sometime in the late 1930s, when antisemitic hatred was surging, Josef managed to escape. Travelling via Prague and Switzerland, he arrived in Britain on Sept 3rd 1939, in the nick of time.

Like so many other European refugees, it was the United States where he really wanted to go – but the ship docked in Liverpool – and if you were a European Jew in 1939, you were grateful to any nation that would let you in at all, and so there he stayed.

After a time as an “enemy alien” at the Huyton internment camp on Merseyside, he made his way to London where he met my grandmother Dora Rosenfeld, daughter of Polish Jewish immigrants, in a refugee centre (the perfect place to meet all incoming single Jewish men, as our family joke goes).

Josef became a writer (best known for *Theodor Herzl: A Biography* (1946) and *The Jews of Austria* (1967)) and a journalist, notably covering the Nuremberg Trials. He was also a founder member of the World Jewish Congress, and astonishingly

for a new immigrant to the UK, had a seat in Westminster Abbey for the Queen's coronation in 1953, as a representative of the foreign press.

Josef was gentle and bookish, and always surrounded by a cloud of cigarette smoke, mounds of newspapers, and strong black coffee. He spoke poor English with a strong German accent; if my grandparents wanted to say things to each other behind my back, it was always in German. To this day, I cannot speak a word of it.

He was already 71 by the time I was born, so I only knew him as an elderly man, doting on me, handing me 50p pieces for pocket money, buying me books. I adored the weekends and school holidays I spent with my grandparents at their home in Clapham and was devastated when he died in 1987 – I was just 13 years old. I regret to this day that that was too young for me to ask him many questions about his childhood, too young for me to comprehend the losses and turmoil that had been a huge part of his earlier life, too young to understand why my grandparents never spoke about the war. It's only when I look at photos like this that I start to piece together their lives and the culture that was lost.

The death of grandparents can often be particularly traumatic for only children: our family unit suddenly shrinks by a much greater proportion than for others. My grandmother Dora died just two years after Josef and I remember being devastated once again.

It is also immensely sad that Josef never got to see his only child become head of an Oxford college and later, a Peer in the House of Lords. Could he ever have imagined it? I look at this photo of lives about to be torn apart and it seems utterly inconceivable. But immigrants often have a steely determination to make the lives of their children better, and to integrate them into society – and that is exactly what happened.

I will stay mesmerised by this photo for the rest of my life.

Sarah Deech describes herself as a former BBC journalist, now freelance media trainer, writer, house operations manager, plant mother, frustrated artist, interiors addict, incompetent gardener. Always writing, always removing exclamation marks. She publishes a blog on <https://substack.com/@londonette>



The AJR presented Gillie Rawson with a special photo frame



Fred Kalb recently revisited the AJR tree he sponsored in 2022

# 190 Combined

The AJR wishes a very hearty mazeltov to two of our members, who collectively have so far lived for an astonishing 190 years.

**Gillie Rawson** celebrated her 100th birthday surrounded by her family. Born in Vienna in 1925, she came to the UK on the Kindertransport at 13 with her younger brother. She lived in Liverpool, then in a refugee hostel in Birmingham where she met Henry, a fellow refugee from Danzig. They later settled in Leeds. Her parents survived Bergen Belsen and moved to the USA, and Gillie visited them often in New York.

Gillie's daughter, Sandi, has been researching her mother's life story and is in the process of writing an interesting article which we look forward to sharing with you early in 2026.

Meanwhile **Fred (Manfred) Kalb** turned 90 towards the end of November. A few weeks before his birthday he and his daughter Rachel were in Broadstairs and took the time to revisit the AJR '80 Trees for 80 Years' oak tree that Fred sponsored which was planted in May 2022 at Discovery Park, on the site of the old Kitchener Camp.

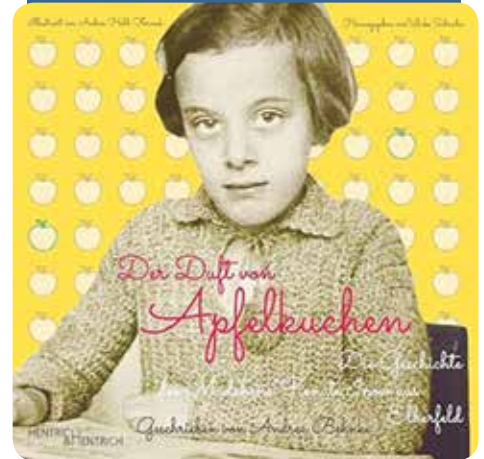
In 1939 Fred's father, Mendel Kalb, managed to escape Nazi oppression in Austria and he was most grateful to be granted asylum by the UK and come here to Sandwich, to the Richborough Camp. The following year however, classed as an "enemy alien", he was sent to Australia on the ill-fated ship Dunera. Despite the torpedoes and the dysentery he survived the 57 day voyage and was transported with the rest of the refugees

to New South Wales where they were detained by the Australian government until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, after which they were reclassified as "friendly aliens".

Meanwhile Fred, who was just a baby, was brought to the UK by his mother and the pair of them were interned on the Isle of Man for 18 months. As soon as Mendel was allowed to return to the UK he joined them there and the family was reunited. On release from the Isle of Man they spent the rest of the war years in Leicester.

Fred counts himself as very fortunate to be amongst the few European Jews who survived the war, and now lives in North London. He was proud to sponsor not just the Sandwich tree but also a second AJR '80 Trees for 80 Years' oak tree, on the Isle of Man, in honour of his late parents.

## DER DUFT VON APFELKUCHEN (The scent of apple pie)



We were recently delighted to receive a very special book in the AJR office: this beautifully illustrated life story of our member **Renate Inow**.

Renate was a Jewish girl from Elberfeld (now Wuppertal) whose parents sent her to England via the Kindertransport, in May 1939.

It was not until many decades later that Renate (who still lives in North West London where she is known as 'Renie') began to talk about her memories, although she has since revisited Wuppertal several times. Now aged 96, Renie fondly remembers the security and love her parents gave her before she had to leave them forever.

Author Andrea Behnke has turned Renie's stories into a very attractive book aimed at children around the same age as Renate was when she was sent to Britain. Written in German and published by Hentrich & Hentrich, the book is beautifully illustrated and contains many anecdotes designed to educate today's young German children on how life was for Jewish children before the war and how 'normal' and integrated they were into German society.

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# IN MEMORY OF AN UNSUNG HERO

The AJR was very sad to learn of the recent passing of Jeffrey Pinnick OBE, a leading figure in Holocaust commemoration. Born in December 1935, Jeffrey trained as a chartered accountant and went on to devote more than five decades to Jewish communal service. He held senior roles across multiple organisations, including as chair of Yad Vashem UK whose current chair, Neil Martin, has written this moving tribute.

There are some people whose names may never appear in headlines, yet without them, whole parts of our communal life would quietly unravel. Jeffrey Pinnick was one of those people – a man of integrity, humility, and steadfast purpose, who gave so much of himself to others and asked for nothing in return.

Jeffrey's leadership was never loud or self-promoting. He worked behind the scenes, where real change so often begins. Whether through his many years of service to Yom HaShoah UK, as Treasurer of the Board of Deputies, Chairs of Yad Vashem UK, All Aboard Charity Shops and Friends of Boys Town Jerusalem, or the rebuilding of Mill Hill Synagogue and so much more, Jeffrey's presence could be felt in every detail: precise, thoughtful, and quietly transformative.

I first met Jeffrey 22 years ago, as a young JLGB bugler when I accompanied Yad Vashem UK and AJEX to mark the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Poland. Jeffrey, alongside Jacques Weisser and the late Sir Ben Helfgott, took me under their wing and later entrusted me with the chairmanship of Yom HaShoah UK when Jeffrey 'insisted' that the baton be passed to me. In truth, I inherited what he had patiently and painstakingly built over decades – not just an event, but an ethos.

Jeffrey created the Forum for Yom HaShoah UK with a mission to ensure remembrance wasn't simply observed once a year but woven into the moral fabric of British Jewish life – and at that time, it wasn't. He believed deeply that remembrance is not only about the past – it must be about the future.

For me personally, his example was both grounding and inspiring – a reminder that leadership isn't about recognition but about responsibility, and that we owed it to the six million murdered, and the survivors and refugees who rebuilt their lives in Britain, to ensure the flame of remembrance was carried from generation to generation.

Even in retirement, Jeffrey's "inner chairman" never truly rested. His thoughtful notes, gentle corrections, and mischievous P.S. lines in emails always carried the same core message: care deeply, prepare thoroughly, and never forget the humanity behind the task.

It was Jeffrey's idea to hold a stadium event in 2015 for the 70th anniversary of Yom HaShoah, excitedly taking me to see Allianz Park and saying, "I'll get the funds, but it needs your vision!" Like the old film adage, "Build it and they will come," the community turned up in its thousands – and I'm not embarrassed to say that we both shed a tear together that day at what we had accomplished.

Jeffrey lived to see, as he called it, his "four-score-years" milestone become a reality this May as we commemorated the 80th anniversary of Yom HaShoah prominently and importantly outside Parliament. Afterwards, he wrote to me: "Any doubts held particularly over these last 20 years as to what Yom HaShoah would look like and its future be at 80 can now, in my humble opinion, be totally dispelled!"

I was so proud to receive his *hechser* of approval – and to help him fulfil his enduring dream.

Jeffrey's passing leaves a quiet void, yet his legacy endures in every



Jeffrey Pinnick OBE

PHOTO © YAD VASHEM UK FOUNDATION

Guardian of the Memory who lights a candle on Yom HaShoah, in the over 200 Legacy of the Holocaust boards placed in communities across the UK, and in the continued life of the many organisations he helped to shape.

He was, in every sense, an unsung hero. And it is now for all of us, who were privileged to know him, work alongside him, and learn from him, to sing his praises – not with grand gestures, but with the same quiet dedication and determination he showed us all, that it's not how loudly one speaks, but how deeply one is felt.

May his memory be for a blessing, and may we honour it through the continued work he so deeply believed in.

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# REVIEWS

## THE CZECH REFUGEE TRUST FUND IN BRITAIN, 1938-1975: A LIFELINE TO FREEDOM

Charmian Brinson and Jana Barbora Buresova  
Vallentine Mitchell

This authoritative study of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund (CRTF) and its predecessor, the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC), fills a notable gap in the historical record of the refugees from Central Europe who fled from the Nazis to Britain.

Between the German occupation of the Sudetenland in autumn 1938 and the outbreak of war in September 1939, at least 12,000 endangered refugees were brought to Britain from Czechoslovakia. Yet, until now, there has been no history of these organisations, even though it was the BCRC that Nicholas Winton joined when he went to Prague in December 1938 and began his famous work of rescue. Winton, it is worth adding, returned to London in January 1939, whereas Doreen Warriner and Trevor Chadwick, principal figures in the BCRC, remained in Prague until after the German occupation in March 1939, leaving only when they themselves came under threat.

The volume is essentially a history of the two organisations based on their documents. The authors are to be congratulated on their admirably thorough research into these records, creating a detailed and sometimes moving account of the Czech exile in Britain. The story of the BCRC, in the early, heroic days of the rescue work, is particularly fascinating. Founded in October 1938, the BCRC was funded by charitable donations which sustained it until July 1938, when it had to be replaced by the state-funded CRTF.

Unlike the refugees from Germany and Austria, those brought over from Czechoslovakia fell into a number of sharply disparate groups, which were often at loggerheads with one another. This complicated situation had its roots in the historical development of the rescue work. After Munich, the BCRC initially sought to assist those who had

fled from the Sudetenland to escape the German occupation. That included many German and Austrian anti-Nazis who had taken refuge in the areas now under occupation, as well as Czech left-wing activists – Social Democrats, Communists, liberals and trade unionists. Of the latter group, those who were Czech-speaking and loyal to the Czech state were often perceived as ethnically distinct from those who were German-speaking, a situation further complicated by the fact that many of both groups were Jewish. These political and ethnic differences and the hostilities to which they gave rise are a recurrent topic in the book.

Much of the book is devoted to an account of the assistance that the CRTF provided for the refugees under its care. This took the form of a range of welfare benefits, especially accommodation, where the CRTF provided housing for refugees and even helped them with loans to secure mortgages. What it achieved is even more remarkable considering that, as a government-funded organisation, it was much hampered by Home Office and Treasury control. It did not cease its activities in 1945, since a fresh wave of refugees arrived in Britain after the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948. The volume's account of the post-war period of Czech exile is particularly valuable.

This study's strength as an organisational history perhaps leads to a certain weakness in its depiction of the everyday existence of the Czech refugees. Its chapter on 'Life in Wartime' is relatively short, shorter than that on internment, which was more fully documented than the rest of the wartime years but lasted only months. It remains, however, a most welcome addition to scholarship in its field.

*Dr Anthony Grenville*

## THE PIANO PLAYER OF BUDAPEST: A TRUE STORY OF MUSIC, SURVIVAL AND HOPE

By Roxanne de Bastion  
Robinson

Budapest was the throbbing heart of a glittering social and musical world before the war where author Roxanne de Bastion's grandfather played the piano at the centre of city nightlife.

Few people have an ancestor who was as accomplished a pianist as hers and although she never got to know him has preserved his memory in this moving book. It tells how both he and the piano survive the Holocaust in this story, which is warmly evocative of Hungarian pre-war life.

According to legend, the baby grand was bought by her great-grandfather Aladar in 1905 as an engagement gift for his wife-to-be Katica. They could have had no inkling of just what lay ahead. Stephen de Bastion or Istvan Bastyai Holtzer as he was then, was born in 1907 the eldest of their four children. By 1923 the prosperous family lived in a 17-room apartment on the corner of the aptly named St Stephen's Square in the city centre.

Always much more interested in music and nightlife than the family textile business, Stephen adopted a playboy lifestyle. He soon became a high earning, in-demand solo player in Hungary and Switzerland and even composed film melodies. After war broke out he had several opportunities to escape but was always reluctant to leave his homeland and family behind.

As Jewish refugees arrive in Budapest, Stephen continued to play the piano until called up for forced labour in Transylvania before eventually returning to the music scene. But in 1942, he was one of 1,070 elite men called up for slave labour on the Russian front. After hard labour, disease, starvation and marching an estimated 1,500km in the freezing Russian countryside, he ended up in a military hospital. Only eight men returned.

More harrowing times follow, although with a short reprieve when Stephen returns to music in the chic Kolibri Club. As war rages, he plays the New Year 1943 in at Roxanne's future grandmother Edith's apartment. But, the hiatus was doomed, and the story follows his brutal descent to Mauthausen concentration camp and its sub-camp Gunskirchen, and the horrors he endured during the Holocaust as a man of Jewish descent. But, finally, he was able to return home and to rehabilitation in a difficult political climate, just as he is showered with accolades and appreciation.

The story is told from Stephen's recollections made on cassette tapes in

his own voice with a thick Hungarian accent. There is also a richly detailed account of horrific conditions after the Nazi invasion of Hungary and treatment by murderous fascist Arrow Cross gangs written by Edith to her brother in England. Edith's first husband Laslo Somogyi was in Siberia with Stephen, but never returned. Amazingly, Stephen's entire family survived the war after being forced to abandon their fortune and apartment.

Despite all adversity, Stephen got on with life and, after marrying Edith, they settled in Stratford-Upon-Avon. Roxanne's father Richard was born, followed by his sister Julie. Stephen continued playing, but with his musical career stifled by the need to make a living, running a restaurant and shops. The piano followed him to England and was later inherited by Roxanne, inspiring her to tell this fascinating story behind the instrument which witnessed so much trauma.

Janet Weston



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# OBITUARIES

## Dr Angela Ruth HOBART

Born: 25 February 1939, Freiburg

Died: 16 August 2025, London



**Angela was the youngest child of Margiana von Schulze-Gaevernitz and Edmund Stinnes. In 1941, aged two, Angela and her family fled Nazi Germany. They escaped through the Swiss Alps, Italy, Vichy France through Spain into Portugal.**

Their non-Nazi friends helped them get through Italy to catch the boat to New York. They included a much-loved Quaker friend called Douglas Steere, who worked with the American Friends Service Committee, and guided them and other Jewish refugees to safety.

Angela's father, Edmund Stinnes, was the eldest son of the German industrialist Hugo Stinnes and later became a financier. Angela's mother, Margiana, famous for her beauty and kindness, worked as a secretary to Albert Einstein and supported her husband in joint philanthropic ventures.

From 1942, Angela settled at Haverford College, Pennsylvania. These years were among the happiest of her life. She



loved playing with the other children and adored her cat, named *Uncle Elizabeth* by their friend Douglas Steere. As a child, she remembered sitting on the stairs every evening as her father read his lectures to her mother, who would correct his English.

After the war ended in 1945, Angela and her parents returned to Europe, where they lived in Ascona, Switzerland. Angela's father gave his homes in Ascona to top-secret peace talks, part of an intelligence operation known as Operation Sunrise. Sunrise was the code name for the diplomatic activities involving a small group of courageous men, which led to the end of World War II in Europe in 1945. Angela's uncle, who was active in the Resistance, was also involved. He served as the closest aide to Allen Dulles of the Office of Strategic Services.

Angela attended the local school and later went to boarding school in Geneva. In 1965, she took a course in art in Florence, where she met her husband, Mark, who has Hungarian Jewish heritage. She worked as an occupational therapist until she met him. They married in Scotland, and she moved to Cambridge, where Mark was studying social anthropology at Cambridge University. They travelled to Bali in the late 1960s and again in 1970 for his anthropological fieldwork.

Bali, one of the islands of the Indonesian archipelago, lies on the world's volcanic belt. Angela lived with indigenous communities in the jungles of Southeast Asia, where the locals had never seen Westerners before, and were untouched by modernisation. She soon became entranced by the Balinese shadow theatre – the most sacred art form in Bali – in which a poet-priest tells stories, projecting shadows of puppets at night under the flickering light of a coconut-oil lamp.

In 1972, Angela returned to London with a suitcase full of ethnographic data, diagrams of puppets, and transcripts of theatre shows. She was fast-tracked into a PhD programme at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She completed her PhD in 1979 and later studied anthropology at the London School of Economics in 1983.

Angela became a distinguished scholar, social anthropologist, and teacher in her own right. She studied Chinese painting in Singapore, and her paintings were exhibited at the Royal Academy, and she gave lectures on Southeast Asian art at the British Museum.

Angela's work extended far beyond academia. She worked as a psychotherapist with refugees, survivors of political cruelty, and women escaping war, with organisations including Freedom from Torture and the Helen Bamber Foundation. She listened to the stories of her clients, witnessed their testimonies, and helped them process trauma and rebuild their shattered lives.

In 1989, she founded the Centro Incontri Umani, a research centre in her family home in Ascona, Switzerland. The Centre is dedicated to scholarship, music, the arts, and to building bridges between people from different cultural backgrounds. In 1990, Angela founded the Sutasoma Trust to provide grants and fellowships to scholars in the social sciences and humanities. The Trust also supports humanitarian projects worldwide.

She leaves behind her daughter, Maya, her former husband, Mark, her extended family, and a global community of friends, artists, and scholars whose lives she touched with compassion, wisdom and kindness.

**Maya Hobart**

## Selma VAN DE PERRE

Born: 7 June 1922, Amsterdam

Died: 20 October 2025, London



**Selma van de Perre, passed away suddenly, aged 103. Her testimony, recorded for AJR Refugee Voices in 2020, is the only testimony we have from a Jewish deported resistance fighter.**

Selma Velleman was 17 when, in 1940, The Netherlands was occupied by German troops. Late in 1942, her father was arrested. She then helped her mother and sister to go into hiding.

Selma hid with people who worked for the Resistance and gradually became involved. She tried to conceal her Jewish identity by dyeing her hair blonde and assuming the alias *Marga van der Kuit*. In this guise she travelled across The Netherlands as a courier for the 'TD Group', a Dutch resistance organisation. She distributed documents and newsletters, helped to forge identity cards, and to take people to their hiding addresses.



Selma van de Perre, in her garden in 2020 with the Dutch version of her book

During the period 1942 – 1945 no one knew her real name nor that she was Jewish. Reflecting on her Resistance activities, Selma told the *Jerusalem Post*: "I'm not sure how I made it. It was just a series of close escapes."

But in July 1944 she was arrested, interrogated and, as a political prisoner, transported to Camp Vught in The Netherlands, and from there to Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. Selma survived slave labour and maltreatment; only kindness from other inmates kept her going. In the cattle wagon to the camp, she wrote a note on toilet paper addressed to her friend in Amsterdam and pushed it through a gap in the floorboards. Visiting this friend years later, she was handed the note. A passer-by had put it in an envelope and posted it.

After liberation, she was sent to Sweden for convalescence. While there, in the hope that her brothers, who had escaped to England before the war, might see her name on a list of returnees from Ravensbrück, she dared to say her real name again: *My name is Selma* became the title of her book.

On her return to The Netherlands, she learned that her parents and sister had been murdered, so decided to join her brothers. Based in London, she worked for the Dutch Embassy, then for the BBC, where she met and married Belgian journalist Hugo van de Perre, with whom she had a son, Jocelyn. In 1957, she graduated in anthropology and sociology from the London School of Economics. Following Hugo's death, she took over from him as the British correspondent for a Dutch television station.

She had intended never to talk about her terrible war experiences but, after attending the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Ravensbrück in 1995, she changed her mind and travelled annually to Ravensbrück to tell trainee teachers about what happened there.

Selma dedicated her later years to sharing her remarkable story with audiences, young and old, in The Netherlands and Germany.

In 2019, her memoir, *My name is Selma* was published in The Netherlands and immediately rose to be top of the Dutch bestseller list. The publication in English followed in 2020. It describes with great modesty her heroism and how she survived capture and incarceration in Ravensbrück.

She also publicised the overlooked contribution that Jews made to the Resistance in The Netherlands, despite them being perceived widely as hapless victims of the Nazis.

Even in the last few years of her life, Selma remained a force of nature – full of hope and courage. Asked by the *Jerusalem Post* for a message for young people today, she said: "I'd like to recommend tolerance. ... try to be tolerant of people around you. ... avoid fights. Fights become conflicts and conflicts become wars. Try to be nice. Love is all that matters in the end."

At the age of 97 she stopped playing golf. Upon reaching her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday she, an accomplished artist, arranged an exhibition to sell her colourful paintings for the benefit of charity.

In 1983 she received the Dutch Resistance Commemorative Cross and, in 2021, was awarded the title of Knight of the *Order of Oranje-Nassau* for longstanding meritorious service to society. At the annual Dutch national WW2 remembrance ceremony she, for many years, laid a wreath immediately after King Willem Alexander to remember the women from Ravensbrück.

**Gaby Glassman**

## IN PERSON EVENTS

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

DATE	TIME OF DAY	AREA	CO-ORDINATOR
Monday 1 December	Afternoon	Hampstead	Ros Hart
Tuesday 2 December	Lunchtime	East Midland	Karen Diamond
Tuesday 2 December	Morning	Ealing	Ros Hart
Wednesday 3 December	Lunchtime	Edinburgh Chanukah Party	Agnes Isaacs
Thursday 4 December	Afternoon	Pinner Chanukah Party	Karen Diamond
Thursday 4 December	Lunchtime	Glasgow Chanukah Party	Agnes Isaacs
Monday 8 December	Lunchtime	Leeds	Michal Mocton
Tuesday 9 December	Morning	Essex and East London	Karen Diamond
Thursday 11 December	Lunchtime	London Groups Chanukah Party	Ros Hart
Monday 15 December	Morning	Wembley	Karen Diamond
Tuesday 16 December	Lunchtime	Edgware, with Jonathan Bergwerk on Burt Bacharach	Ros Hart
Tuesday 16 December	Lunchtime	Liverpool	Michal Mocton
Wednesday 17 December	Lunchtime	Manchester	Michal Mocton
Wednesday 17 December	Lunchtime	Muswell Hill	Ros Hart
Monday 22 December	Lunchtime	Brighton	Ros Hart

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## ZOOMS AHEAD

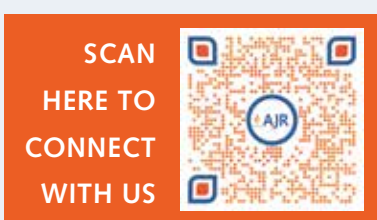
Details of all meetings and the links to join will appear in the e-newsletter each Sunday.

Monday 1 December @ 4pm	<b>Jacqueline Passman – A cool head in hell: her father's extraordinary survival story as a Jewish doctor in Japanese POW camps during WW2</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81075790560">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81075790560</a>	Meeting ID: 810 7579 0560
Monday 1 December @ 3pm	<b>Kinder Contact Meeting</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81922888302">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81922888302</a>	Meeting ID: 819 2288 8302
Wednesday 3 December @ 4pm	<b>Debra Brunner – The lost history of Jewish Belarus</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/84651685735">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/84651685735</a>	Meeting ID: 8465 168 5735
Monday 8 December @ 4pm	<b>Daniel Frank – Echoes of the Past: Uncovering Jewish life in Ancient Egypt</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81220519556">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/81220519556</a>	Meeting ID 812 2051 9556
Monday 15 December @ 4pm	<b>Film: A Yiddish world remembered – the story of Jewish life in Eastern Europe</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/82274224495">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/82274224495</a>	Meeting ID: 822 7422 4495
Tuesday 16 December @ 4pm	<b>Book Discussion (no speaker) – Books by Agatha Christie</b> <a href="https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87913461361">https://ajr-org-uk.zoom.us/j/87913461361</a>	Meeting ID: 8791 346 1361

## 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 yoga)	<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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