

Recognition of a wrong done - a remarkable visit to Mössingen

In 1936 the brothers Artur and Felix Löwenstein left Germany following the sale, enforced by the Nazis, of their textile business Mechanische Weberei Pausa. In late 2008 Doris Angel, daughter of Felix, and Harold Livingston, son of Artur, received a letter from the 'Löwenstein Research Association'. This proved to be a group of local citizens who realised that our fathers had put the town of Mössingen on the artistic map when in 1919 they established Pausa, developing it into a world-renowned manufacturer of modern fabrics for the interior design industries and introducing Bauhaus-style design to their woven and printed fabrics. Pausa's reputation was confirmed by a commendation at the World Fair in Barcelona in 1929.

The Löwenstein Research Association, wishing to honour the contribution Artur and Felix had made to the town, had traced us. They had enrolled the support of Mössingen's mayor and town council, who invited us to Mössingen at their expense.

In July 2009 we flew to Germany, accompanied by Harold's daughter Jacqui Cowley and his nephew Ronnie Jacob, son of the late Lilo Löwenstein, daughter of Artur, and Ann Angel and Tony Paxton, Doris's daughter and son-in-law. We were joined by Hamburg cousins Sandra and Cathy Lustig.

Our stay in Mössingen included a tour of the former Pausa sites, a formal reception by the mayor, at which we signed the town's 'Golden Book', a trip to our parental home in Stuttgart, a dialogue with local schoolchildren, a



Mayor Werner Fifka (left), Harold Livingston, Doris Angel: A new square in Mössingen is to be named after the Löwenstein family

rendering of the 'Pausa Symphony', and the launch of the Löwenstein Research Association programme. Dr Jan Bloch, son of Ernst and Karola Bloch, also gave a talk connecting the Bauhaus design culture with other aspects of contemporary political thinking. Our visit featured prominently in the local media.

The original Pausa factory was pulled down in the 1980s and is now the site of a state-of-the-art home for senior citizens. Outside is a plaque commemorating Pausa and stating that it was owned by the 'Jewish brothers Löwenstein'. The newer factory closed only in 2001 and part of it is to be preserved as a museum. It contains thousands of fabrics printed in the Pausa/Bauhaus style.

The highlight of our visit was a reception at the old school gym, attended by hundreds of the town's citizens including former Pausa employees. Speeches were made by Werner Fifka, the mayor, Lothar Frick, director of Civic Education in Baden-Württemberg, and Irene Scherer,

head of the Löwenstein Research Association. The mayor said, among other things:

When we think back today in this special place, right here in the gym of the old school, where the well-known Mössingen strike against Hitler began, we must appreciate what the Löwenstein family accomplished before 1933. We must think about the injustice which [they] and their families had to contend with under Nazi rule. It is time to talk about the wrong that was done in our town at that time. The Nazis chased the Löwenstein brothers out of Mössingen. This was not right. It was a crime. We cannot change the facts of what took place in those dark times. I ask you to accept our apology

for all the suffering that you and your mothers and fathers had to go through. I do hope you will accept this apology. Arthur and Felix Löwenstein are part of the history of Mössingen and we should keep that in our minds forever.

The mayor announced that a new town square was to be named Löwenstein-Platz and that the town's library would be renamed the Löwenstein Library.

We both responded with speeches and presented a book of designs, which had left Germany with Doris's family in the 1930s. We were given a standing ovation.

It wasn't easy for the mayor to say what he did. He said it with humility. You can't undo the past, but the recognition of the wrong that had been done was for us absolutely essential. This, together with the dedication of the Löwenstein Research Association and the honour shown our family by local citizens, made the visit quite remarkable.

Doris Angel
Harold Livingston

George Weidenfeld at 90

Publisher, politician, peacemaker, promoter of the arts and the humanities in general, having celebrated entry into his tenth decade in September, his lordship is still at it – indefatigably so say some, over-zealously say others.

He has certainly made an art of celebrating and being celebrated. There were at least four birthday parties, the largest given for him by Lord Foster, he of Wembley Stadium and the wobbly bridge, in Switzerland; a smaller one in Germany, for which Angela Merkel took time out from the *Wahlkampf*; a very select gathering for a mere 20 of the Austrian elite hosted by the Bundespräsident; and then a party for

family and close friends in his mega flat in Chelsea, book- and picture-lined as a perfect setting for entertaining the *haut monde*, making deals, conspiring to do good.

The glamour sometimes blinds us to the good works. His commitment to Israel has been unwavering since the days when, in his early twenties, he worked as an assistant to Weizmann. Through his publishing business he has provided a platform for many politicians, particularly of the left, to lay out their wares; Harold Wilson became a close friend. Today his links with Labour are not as close and his horizon has widened. While the affairs of Israel and reconciliation (Jew/German, Israeli/Arab) are probably still at the top of

his agenda, he is now engaged in bringing into life an ambitious programme of study of arts and humanities in Oxford and Cambridge, which, it is hoped, will take the form of Visiting Chairs coupled with symposia in different branches of the humanities. This can be seen as a broadening of the series of lectures given annually by the Weidenfeld Visiting Professors of European Comparative Literature, which began in 1995 and has included such stars as Amos Oz, Umberto Eco, Nike Wagner and Mario Vargas Llosa. George Weidenfeld has been fortunate in being able to repay, by enriching the cultural life of this country, a debt that he and all of us owe. May he long be spared to do so.

AJR journal

Association of Jewish Refugees

The first AJR local groups (Part II)*

The smaller AJR groups that grew up in towns and cities in the post-war period reflected the distribution of the Jewish refugees from Hitler across the length and breadth of Britain. It was only at this stage, after the war, that most refugees were able to settle more securely and to put down roots in locations of their own choosing.

Before the war, a large number of refugees had made for London, where many of them lived a provisional and impermanent life in rented rooms, flats and bedsits and often with frequent changes of address. The difficulty they had in finding secure employment contributed to the instability of their circumstances. Others, such as Kindertransport children placed in hostels or domestic servants employed by British families, found themselves scattered across the country in places to which they had been allocated and where they had little wish to stay permanently.

The war had then further disrupted the process of settlement. Many refugees were interned in 1940; others left cities like London to avoid the bombing, or volunteered for the armed forces and were sent to train and serve far from home, or took advantage of the wartime demand for labour to leave their first, unsatisfactory positions for better opportunities elsewhere in Britain. Overall, the pre-war and wartime years were a period of flux and instability for the refugees.

After the war, the refugees spread widely across the country. In late summer 1959, to take just two examples, *AJR Information* published a letter from Stella Kurrein, the widow of a rabbi from Linz in Austria now resident in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, and a birthday tribute to Dr Walter Gordon, a geriatric specialist practising at St Mary's Hospital, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. Refugees were also to be found in remoter locations: the cultural commentator PEM reported that the actress Irene Triesch, aged 80, was living in obscurity in Scotland; Toni Goldstein ran 'Arvonía', a rest and convalescence home, in Abersoch, North Wales; and the refugee firm O.P. Chocolate Specialities Ltd produced 'Mozart Bon-Bons', 'Pischinger



Werner Rosenstock, AJR General Secretary, 1941-82; Editor, *AJR Information*, 1946-82

Torten to the original recipe' and other Viennese specialities in Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan.

By the early 1950s, the AJR local groups probably numbered about 20. Werner Rosenstock, AJR General Secretary, fresh from a tour of local groups, observed in August 1951 that the movement of refugees to London had caused some of the groups to cease functioning, but that the surviving majority had consolidated themselves and were flourishing. Rosenstock's opening remarks, however, betrayed the widespread perception of the refugee community as predominantly concentrated in London, with the groups in the regions as dependent appendages: 'Visits to the local branches in the Provinces', he wrote with every assurance of metropolitan superiority, 'are always a stimulating experience for a representative of AJR Headquarters ... There is always the danger of seeing things in the wrong perspective if one only relies on written correspondence.'

Nevertheless, Rosenstock saw clearly enough the very real benefits that the groups brought both to their members

and to the AJR: 'It has been one of the achievements of the AJR that it has built up a nation-wide organisation with self-contained groups in those towns in which there was a sufficient number of local members.' Those members supported the general work of the AJR and maintained an active local group life, thanks to the devoted services of the committee members who generously undertook 'the tiresome and not always gratifying work on the spot'.

From the start, reports on problems specific to refugees and on the work of the AJR featured prominently on the agendas of meetings held by local groups. Other activities mentioned in *AJR Information* in January 1946 (its first issue) were lectures and talks, social gatherings and concerts, all of which allowed 'a regular club life' to develop. The feeling of companionship and supportive sympathy that could be enjoyed when people with a shared background and culture met regularly was without doubt one of the groups' principal attractions for their members, as yet only very partially integrated into British society.

Rosenstock emphasised the value of 'the cordial personal relationship between members in the medium-sized towns, where the individual does not sink into anonymity, as he is bound to do in London'. The local groups also maintained the tradition of social responsibility that had characterised German Jewry in pre-Hitler days: 'It is particularly gratifying to sense the strong feeling of solidarity amongst those who have been able to build up their lives anew, but who consider it one of their foremost duties to provide a homely atmosphere for their less fortunate, mainly elderly fellow refugees.' As noted last month in connection with the Morris Feinmann Homes in Manchester and the Mutual Refugee Aid Society in Glasgow, this was a defining feature of refugee life in those cities.

Over the years, however, the groups faced a struggle to survive. This was true even of those in the larger British cities, as a report in *AJR Information* on a meeting of the AJR Leeds Group showed.

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