

'WHEN I DREAM I DREAM IN ENGLISH'

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How have German and Austrian refugee Jews assimilated to Britain?

EVERY morning a small north London colony of European refugees congregate in the Cosmo cafe in Swiss Cottage. The coffee is bitter and strong and the croissants are rather heavy, but if you get there at eight in the morning the Danish pastries are sweet and hot.

Many of the German and Austrian Jews here live in Hampstead, just up the hill. They used to enjoy a larger restaurant in the John Barnes department store on Finchley Road as a meeting point. But since the store shut down, they have fewer points of rendezvous. Today's lunch menu at the Cosmo offers a memory and taste of lifestyle long gone: Herring Salad Bismark, 98p; Westphalian Bean Soup, 80p; Karlsbader Veal Goulash with noodles, £3.85p; Rheinischer Sauerbraten with raisin sauce, red cabbage and dumplings, £3.98p.

They are known as the Yeckes by other Jews. *Die Jäcke* in German means "the jacket." German Jews are famous for their loyalty to German social formalities. For example, even in the hottest summer the German Jewish gentleman will keep his jacket on. He is also keen on punctuality, order and culture, particularly music. And the Yeckes, being the most assimilated of all European Jews, still have the reputation of being social snobs and looking down on their east European cousins—the Ostjude.

Most British Jews came in waves during the end of the 19th century to escape pogroms in Russia and Poland. The uneasy relationship between them and the newer wave of Yeckes (who came to escape Nazism) has remained over the last 40 years. But if the Yeckes found it difficult to assimilate into English Jewish society—how easily have they lived in England itself?

There has been no shortage of German and Austrian Jewish refugees in the upper echelons of English society. Here are a few: the architectural historian, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner; the art historian, Sir Ernst Gombrich; the writer and critic, Martin Esslin; the marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm; the Canon of Southwark cathedral, Paul Ostreicher; the novelist, Eva Figes; the scientist, Sir Hermann Bondi; the publisher, Lord Weidenfeld; the Nobel prize winners, Sir Bernard Katz and Sir Hans Krebs; the biochemist, Sir Hans Kornberg; the historian, Walter Laqueur; the social psychologist, Hilde Himmelweit; the economist, Sir Claus Moser; the stage designer, Ralph Koltai; the actress Lilli Palmer; the theatre critic and playwright, Frank Marcus; the political philosopher, Sir Karl Popper; and the Chief Rabbi himself, Sir Immanuel Jacobovits. All the same, British attitudes to the 56,000 refugees who came from Germany and Austria (and Czechoslovakia) between 1933 and 1939 were ambiguous. A cabinet discussion on 12 April 1933 noted that it would be in the public interest "to secure for this country prominent Jews who were being expelled from Germany and who had achieved distinction in pure science, applied science, music

or art." But there was also much suspicion directed towards these Jews.

Sir William Bragg, the then president of the Royal Society, was approached by Lord Rutherford on behalf of the Academic Assistance Council (whose aim was to aid academics abroad who were suffering religious, political or racial persecution). Bragg's response was: "It is possible to do more harm than good by angering the people in charge in Germany." Professional jealousy, xenophobia and a strain of anti-semitism, all surfaced at every level of society. On 14 June 1938 the *Sunday Express* wrote: "In Britain half a million Jews find their home. They are never persecuted and in many respects, the Jews are given favourable treatment here. But just now there is a big influx of foreign Jews into Britain. They are overrunning the country."

One such escapee is Werner Zikel. He has lived in Britain since 1939 but—despite his Welsh wife, Betsy—most of his friends, he says, "are continental." He was born in Berlin in 1910 and studied engineering. The Nazis only allowed him to complete his degree because his father had been an *alter Kämpfer*, a veteran of the first world war. "My father was a well-known doctor who wrote books on healthy eating, long before such topics became fashionable," he says, "and he thought that he was so assimilated that he gave his sons three utterly German names, Herbert, Gerhard and Werner. That's me."

The name, Werner, is cognate with the verb, *warnen*—to warn. It is traditionally supposed to originate in the story of a soldier who gave the warning when enemy troops were about to invade. "But I didn't give the warning," he says. "I was one of the last to get out."

Escape came by chance when a Colonel Holmes was sent over to Germany to find new engineers to promote industry on Tyneside. He met Werner Zikel and arranged for an entry permit, just a few months before war broke out. The Tyneside scheme never materialised. Instead, Werner Zikel ended up working in a factory that made sawmill machinery in south Wales, where he met his wife.

When the Germans invaded France, he was interned as an enemy alien, sent to a camp at Huyton outside Liverpool, and then shipped off to Canada, just after the sinking of the *Arandora Star* by German torpedoes. He spent ten months chopping wood in Canada, before he was released and sent to design tools for Surrey Precision, a wartime establishment in Barking, Essex.

When the war ended, he and a friend found themselves discussing the merits of German sausages and whether they should be imported. Nostalgia prompted the idea of inventing a machine for making them in Britain. His machine is still being used today. It led to his flourishing business, selling food machines, in Regency Parade, a few yards from the Cosmo cafe.