

FUNDING NEWS

New 4 Million Euro Lab dedicated to Holocaust Memory launches at Sussex

Dr Victoria Grace Walden and Dr Kate Marrison will be joined by an expanded team this summer to launch a new 5-year project funded by the Alfred Landecker Foundation. Awarded 4,100,000 Euros, Dr Walden will lead the Landecker Digital Memory Lab: Connective Holocaust Commemoration which is dedicated to enhancing the sustainability of digital Holocaust memory. Alongside the production of original research, the Lab's activities will include the development of a 'living database', which will preserve recordings of digital projects dedicated to Holocaust memory complemented by interviews with the variety of professionals involved in their development and use at Holocaust sites (from programmers and designers to curators and educators). The 'living database' aims to help Holocaust memory and education institutions learn from historical digital practice by providing the first database and archive of this type of project. Alongside this, the Lab's team will develop a new online journal dedicated to digital Holocaust memory with an international editorial board, a suite of free Career Professional Development programmes for Holocaust professionals and their creative partners focused on AI and machine learning; virtual and augmented technologies; computer games; social media and other digital topics tailored for the needs of those working with the type of sensitive historical material as that related to this past. The team will also run a series of innovation initiatives across Europe, bringing together heritage, creative and tech professionals, and academics to design digital solutions to sector-wide challenges, and will host three international conferences. These in-person events will be co-hosted with international projects partners across Europe.

The Lab's objectives build upon the work Dr Walden led during the Covid-19 lockdowns, hosting online events and writing public blogs



Screens at the historical site of Westerbork transit camp present footage from the infamous film at the places where researchers believe they were shot.

on www.digitalholocaustmemory.com and the recommendations reports on which she, Dr Marrison and a number of external partners collaborated.

To support marking the launch of the Lab, Dr Walden has been awarded £19,000 from a combination of the AHRC Impact Acceleration Award, Higher Education Innovation Fund, and the Weidenfeld Institute to host three events: a symposium with academics, educators and curators in Australia co-hosted with the Melbourne Holocaust Museum; a workshop with policymakers and funders at the University of Sussex hosted together with the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, Department of Global Communications, United Nations; and another with professionals from South American Holocaust institutions in Lima, Peru, which will be held as part of the programme of the annual Memory Studies Association conference.

You can find out more about the Alfred Landecker Foundation here: <https://www.alfredlandecker.org/en/>

Holocaust Memorial Day

University of Sussex,
Wednesday 7 February 2024



The 2024 theme for Holocaust Memorial Day was the 'Fragility of Freedom.'

Opening the event, in the packed Attenborough Centre on the University of Sussex campus, Vice Chancellor, Professor Sasha Rosneil reminded us that it was of utmost importance to remember our shared humanity, whatever our different backgrounds or identities.

Her words were met with approbation by the audience which included pupils from six schools from the Sussex area, the highest ever number of schools to attend the university's HMD.

Ivor Perl – Holocaust survivor, who was born in Mako, Hungary, in 1932, gave a presentation along with his granddaughter Lia Bratt. A film of his life was shown while Lia narrated his experiences. At the opening of the film Ivor, said: "...if there is one thing to take away from my story, it is that if the members of a society allow themselves to be brainwashed by hatred, that can only lead to one thing, the destruction of civilisation. And I'm talking from personal experience...."

The small details of Ivor's story made it most poignant. To prepare for deportation in May 1944, Ivor's mother prepared a pot of chicken soup which she carried to the deportation point and placed in the shade of a tree. In the shambles of boarding one of the cattle trucks taking the Mako Jews to Szeged, she forgot the pot, so the Perlmutter family had nothing to eat on the journey. Ivor named his book of memoirs: 'Chicken Soup in the Shade of the Tree.'

At the end of the film Ivor shared three pearls of wisdom, "Firstly, do not be a bystander to any kind of racism or prejudice, including antisemitism. Secondly, no matter how many times you get knocked down, pick yourself up and try your best to carry on. If I can do it, you can. Thirdly, it is far better and easier to love than to hate."

The second part of the programme was a discussion between Professor Ivor Gaber and film director, Amanda Rubin. Amanda is making a film on the work of the German-Jewish journalist, Charlotte Beradt who lived in Berlin in the 1930s. Amanda showed a 6-minute taster of her film, entitled: 'The Third Reich of Dreams' based on the book by Beradt, featuring 80 dreams out of the collection of 300 dreams of Jews and non-Jews which she recorded, at great risk to herself, during the '30s and smuggled out of Germany before she escaped in 1939.

Amanda was inspired to make the film after reading an article in the New Yorker entitled 'How Dreams Change under Authoritarianism.' A discussion with the audience followed her presentation.

Workshop report: Space and Place

In May 2022 a workshop entitled: 'Space and Place in the German-Jewish Experience of the 1930s' was organised by the Weidenfeld Institute in cooperation with the University of Rostock, the Institute for the History of the German Jews in Hamburg (IGdJ) and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The workshop took place in Rostock. The participants explored spatial aspects of the experiences of German Jews during the 1930s in Germany and highlighted the convoluted relations between place and identity and the essential influence of these relations on the history of emotions, thoughts and culture. The workshop focused on the spaces that shaped German-Jewish self-perception in the face of National Socialism. Selected outputs will be published in the journal 'Jewish History and Culture.' It will be available in Open Access from June 2024.

In Katrin Steffen's chapter in this forthcoming publication she looks at Jews from the province of Posen who formed their own special community in Berlin after the Posen province fell to Poland in 1918 forcing them to leave. They attempted to transfer the East-German-Jewish space they had created over the previous century in Posen, to the city of Berlin, and founded a newspaper called the 'Posener Heimatblätter'. They gathered regularly to exchange memories on the 'Heimat' and to discuss ongoing challenges in the face of National Socialism. It was their declared aim to preserve the special understanding of Jewishness that had emerged in Posen as being firmly rooted in Jewish religious tradition and also having a strong bond to German Jewry.

(Katrin asks if any readers who are descendants of families from the Posen area or from the Silesian town of Breslau who might be willing to share their memories to kindly contact her by emailing k.steffen@sussex.ac.uk).

Exhibition on the Polenaktion 1938

Katrin Steffen arranged for an exhibition to be shown for a week in February in the foyer of the Attenborough Centre on the Sussex campus. The exhibition is entitled: 'Expelled! 28 October 1938, the History of the 'Polenaktion' (Polish Action).' This was timed to coincide with the Sussex Holocaust Memorial Day event. The exhibition shows the first mass deportation of Jews from Germany in October 1938. This forced expulsion, designated the Polenaktion ('Polish Action'), targeted 17,000 Jews with Polish passports who were arrested, rounded up and transported by train to the Polish border. After living in Germany for decades, the expulsion came as a complete surprise. At the Polish-German border, a humanitarian catastrophe ensued as they were forced to cross into Poland. Those that survived became refugees, cared for by the Polish-Jewish community and received help from the American Joint Distribution Committee. Approximately 150 children were saved in three Kindertransports.

The exhibition was then taken to the Brighton and Hove Jewish Centre (BNJC) for a one-day event where curator Christine Meibeck

(University of Potsdam) described how she put the exhibition together. She also shared her encounters with some of the survivors and their families. Her talk was followed by a lively discussion, chaired by Dr Gerhard Wolf (University of Sussex).



Arrival of Polish children in London from a Kindertransport, February 1939
(copyright: Bundesarchiv)

Opening the Mass Observation Archive: British Responses to the Holocaust Workshop Series



The Isaacsohn and André Families Fellows Research Group



Students at the
Mass Observation Archive

Throughout March, undergraduate students at the University of Sussex have been engaged in a workshop series as part of the Sussex Digital Holocaust Education Project. The project's central research question asks 'What did everyday people in Britain know about the Holocaust before, during and after the war?' To investigate this, students were introduced to the Mass Observation Archive which is one of the special collections held at The Keep. Throughout the workshops, undergraduates were able to liaise with members of the core team and were given a behind-the-scenes tour of the Keep's holdings. They were invited to consult original material including diary entries, file reports, day surveys and topic collections which

have been identified as primary sources by The Isaacsohn and André Research Fellows who have been conducting research on this topic since October. During the summer of 2024, the students will embark upon their own contribution to the project as they develop a teaching resource to frame this material for key stage 3 learning.

What is queer Holocaust history and why does one study it?

In March 2024, the History Department hosted a talk by Dr Anna Hájková (University of Warwick) on the topic: 'What is queer Holocaust history and why does one study it?' Dr Hájková's book entitled: 'The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt,' was published by Oxford University Press in 2020. In 2021, Wallstein published Anna's book entitled 'Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub' on queer teenagers during the Holocaust. This will be published by University of Toronto Press in an expanded English translation under the title: 'People Without History are Dust.'

In her talk at Sussex, Anna Hájková introduced queer Holocaust history – same sex desire among Jews persecuted by the Nazis. Using several case studies based on oral histories, memoirs, court proceedings and the Arolsen records, she showed how queer Holocaust history casts a new light on the society of the Holocaust victims, agency, homophobia and the question of who belongs in our history.



Anna Hájková with Holocaust survivor Margot Heumann

Dealing with fallout from October 7, 2023

The ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine has given rise to fear, anger and anxiety for many in the Sussex community, sometimes coupled with passionately held and polarised opinions. At the same time, there is recognition of the need for dialogue. To this end, the University organised a community dialogue on the conflict on 16 January 2024, with a follow-up for those who wished on 18 March. The purpose was to come together to share thoughts and feelings in a 'listening and dialogue circle,' guided by our values of collaboration, courage, inclusion, integrity, and kindness.

Dialogue is not 'discussion' or 'debate;' the aim was not to reach agreement or consensus, nor decide on courses of action, nor indeed to 'campaign.' Instead, dialogue can offer hope that something different is possible and, supported by external facilitators, we sought to create a space to recognise and insist upon our shared humanity and to allow honest sharing and open listening to help understand how history and experiences shape our own and others' beliefs, lead to recognition of common ground, and support authentic, respectful relationships. As far as possible, we sought to include a range of perspectives and backgrounds. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and the group spoke with respect, honesty and courage, sharing grief, hopes and fears.

David Ruebain

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Culture, Equality & Inclusion), University of Sussex

WIGS Book Prize

On Friday 3 November 2023, Dr Liza Weber was awarded the Women in German Studies (WIGS) Book Prize during the society's annual conference at the Department of Modern Languages and Culture, University of Exeter. Sponsored by Peter Lang, the prize is £150, plus the opportunity to develop their book for publication. Liza's proposal 'documenta and its Double: Germany's Myth of Modernism in Memory and Provenance, from 'Degenerate' to documenta (1937-1955)' received much praise from the WIGS committee, including the following comments:

'The author's expertise shines through the clear and engaging writing and as a reader I felt swept along. The interdisciplinarity of the book is really impressive: it brings together a focus on art history, German studies and memory culture with oral history methods, to capture a fascinating period in German history.'

'The combination of an interdisciplinary, rigorous academic approach with the author's reflective, more personal tone ensures her examination of the *Trümmerzeit* period is both thorough and original. It is also an important study as it draws on interviews with those who lived through (or were born in) this traumatic period of German history at a time when we are moving from the era of living memory to cultural memory.'

'Documenta and its Double' will be published as part of the Peter Lang book series, German Visual Culture, edited by Christian Weikop (University of Edinburgh). Interestingly, the founder of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, Professor Edward Timms, published his book on 'Anna Haag and her Secret Diary of the Second World War' with Peter Lang back in 2016.



Liza Weber with her award of the WIGS Book Prize

From Our Archives: The 1944 'Horrors of the German Concentration Camp' Exhibition



Brochure of the 'War in Wax' exhibition as found in Mass Observation archive, University of Sussex

If you strolled along London's Oxford Street in February 1944, you would likely have encountered the 'War in Wax' exhibition near Tottenham Court Road Tube Station. Outside the venue, a uniformed commissioner invited in passersby with the announcement, 'Visit the War in Wax Exhibition. See the great Allied leaders and the Horrors of the German Concentration Camp.' Indeed, it may be surprising to learn that 'The Horrors of the German Concentration Camp' was the centerpiece of this exhibition. This makes it one of the earliest displays of Nazis atrocities open to the general public. Drawing on official British government sources, the 'Horrors of the German Concentration Camp' exhibition was divided into nine sections. Each section was meticulously crafted to depict the atrocities committed in these camps.

In early 1944, the Mass Observation Project, whose extensive archives are held at our university, dispatched an observer to document visitors' reactions to this exhibition. Among the recorded comments was one from a 45-year-old woman who said, 'They (the Germans) don't seem to have any human feeling. It doesn't seem possible for anybody with a spark of decency to do these things. They should exterminate the lot this time.' Two 17-year-old schoolgirls were quoted saying, 'It's terrible. The Germans are dirty devils. It gives us the creeps to see what they do to people. It makes us feel funny that such things might have happened here if Hitler

had had the chance. We should give them a dose of their own medicine.' By mid-1946, Mass Observation recorded noticeably different reactions to the same exhibition. One male visitor remarked, 'Shocking, isn't it? If I'd known what it was like, I wouldn't have come in.' While this is not the place to explore the reasons behind these differing responses, it is important to highlight a significant absence. There is no specific mention of who the victims of Nazi atrocities were either in the exhibition or in Mass Observation reports. The victims remained largely faceless, which considering our current understanding of the central role of Jewish persecution under National Socialism is most striking.

The omission of Jewish victims reflects a broader trend of the time, yet this doesn't mean that Mass Observation overlooked Jewish issues in its broader work. Since its establishment in 1937, Mass Observation explored public attitudes towards Jews, especially during a period when Jews were central to major political events in Europe and the Middle East. This context made any opinion on Jews inherently political, influencing Mass Observation's focus on what contemporaries saw as the 'Jewish question.' Moreover, Mass Observation's various directives issued from the late 1930s to the early 1950s reveal a preoccupation with an effort to disentangle the perceived notion of Jewish difference. The intersection of this ambiguous notion of Jewish otherness and the politicisation of Jews seems to have resulted in a notable difficulty in fostering empathy towards them.

Since 1945 there has been a transformation in how we remember the war, particularly in relation to the Holocaust. Initially perceived as one among many wartime atrocities, the extermination of European Jews has increasingly become a central element in our understanding of the war itself. The establishment of a term specifically for this event highlights this change, acknowledging Jews as the primary victims of National Socialism. Crucially, this new understanding of the significance of the Holocaust represents a shift from earlier narratives that saw Jews mainly as a 'problem,' towards a recognition of Jewish subjectivity. Despite its widespread acceptance, this approach has vulnerabilities. As the memory of the Holocaust globalised, various groups have aligned their own victimhood narratives with it, sometimes leading to a competitive dynamic. The tendency to compare the experiences of suffering among different groups has not only risked overshadowing the unique aspects and historical context of each experience, but also reinforces the perception of Jews predominantly as victims. Consequently, any deviation from this victim role, especially in the form of perceived Jewish transgressions, poses a significant challenge to this established narrative framework. The events following October 7, 2023 serve as a stark example, sparking fears of reverting public discourse to the times when Jews were predominantly conceived as a problem. The Institute's response to these challenges is rooted in our foundational strengths: conducting research, fostering learning and creating platforms for open dialogue. As an institution committed to exploring the Jewish experience within a broad framework, this approach facilitates the discussion of even the most delicate topics, illustrating our dedication to research, learning and dialogue.

Gideon Reuveni

Ilse Eton legacy

This year we have had the privilege of continuing one supporter's mission for research and education. Born in Düsseldorf in 1922, Ilse Eton and her family came to the UK as Jewish refugees before World War II. Ilse found the opportunity to study in England and was later employed at the BBC and as a secretary for the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. Realising that her displacement had impacted the education and life she could have had, she filed a claim for compensation for loss of education when German restitution laws came into existence.

Ilse greatly enjoyed reading the publications she received as a Friend of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies and regularly shared observations on the academic papers and newsletters.

Ilse also donated a collection of her papers to the University of Sussex. These range from restitution claims, work on Holocaust remembrance and correspondence on refugee experience. Her papers form part of the special collection held at The Keep and are valuable resource for studying the German-Jewish experience.

Ilse died at the age of 100 and left a generous legacy to the Centre for German-Jewish Studies. Her gift will be used to support publication of Centre research papers relating to the history of Jews in German-speaking lands and continues her mission to contribute to education.

We are most grateful to Ilse – and for all the support the University has received through gifts left in wills. These legacies have the power to be genuinely transformative to our students' research, alongside the wider impact the University can make around the world.

If you are interested in leaving a gift to The Sussex Weidenfeld Institute of Jewish Studies, we would be delighted to hear from you. For more information or an informal chat please get in touch with our Development Team.

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Hella Pick CBE

Hella Pick died on Thursday 4 April 2024 at the age of 94. A former *Guardian* foreign correspondent and diplomatic editor, and the holder of an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sussex, Hella was one of the most influential and prominent members of the Support Group and Advisory Board of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies. A crucial part of the centre since its inception in 1995, Hella was also a passionate advocate and friend of the University who remained closely involved with Sussex until her final days.

A longer tribute to Hella will appear in our next newsletter.



Edward Timms Memorial History Prize

We congratulate **Lyla Amin** on being awarded the Edward Timms Memorial History Prize. Generously donated by Dr Stephen Nicholls, the Edward Timms Memorial Prize of £100, will be presented annually. It recognizes the top-performing students in courses that align with Edward Timms' broad research interests, encompassing both German-Jewish history and Middle East studies.

New publications

Gideon Reuveni

"The Phantom Giant, the No-Key Gate, and the Beauty Salon of History: The German-Jewish Reparation Settlement and the Holocaust," *S:I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation* Vol. 10 No. 3 (2023), 86-103.

Katrin Steffen

"Vorstellungen vom 'Ostjüdischen.' Zur Notwendigkeit einer begrifflichen Befreiung," (Imagining the 'Eastern Jew.' On the necessity of a conceptual liberation) *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Polens Instituts* (2023), 59-67.

David Tal

The Judeo-Christian Tradition and the US-Israel Special Relationship, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2023), 755-776

For further information about the Weidenfeld Institute/Centre for German-Jewish Studies and joining the Friends please contact:

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www.sussex.ac.uk/research/centres/jewish-studies/