

## Holocaust Memorial Day at the University of Sussex

Wednesday 28th January 2015

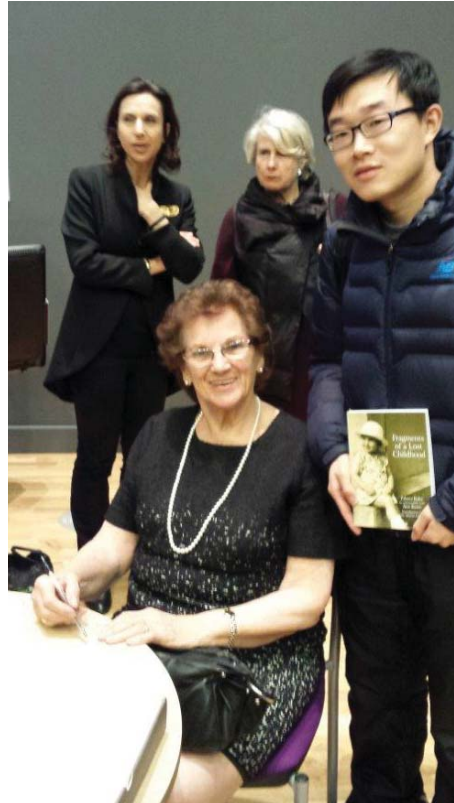
The event began with a riveting account by the author Thomas Harding of the capture by his great-uncle, Hanns Hermann Alexander, of one of the most notorious Nazi war criminals, Rudolf Höss. Drawing a wealth of historical details and documentary photos from his bestselling book, *Hanns and Rudolf: The German Jew and the Hunt for the Commandant of Auschwitz*, Harding guided a large audience on a journey into the past just as compelling as any political thriller.

At the time of Hanns Alexander's death in 2006, Harding had no inkling of his exploits as interpreter and war crimes investigator for the British army. After arriving in Britain in 1936 as refugees from Berlin, the Alexander family had quickly adapted to professional life in London. Hanns's father re-established his career as a doctor, while Hanns himself later went into banking. If he made an impression at family gatherings, this was due not to his war record but to his impish sense of humour.

A very different picture emerged when Harding began to research the files on Captain H. H. Alexander. As a British officer fluent in German, Hanns was put in charge of prisoners of war in July 1944 after the Normandy landings, and he then played a leading role in the interrogation of concentration camp guards at Belsen. This put him on the track of Rudolf Höss, who had assumed a false identity and gone into hiding at a remote farm near the Danish border. Concealment was easy because in younger days Höss really had been a farmer. In Pomerania he and his wife Hedwig had begun to raise their family of five children as members of a back-to-the-land movement loosely associated with the Nazi party. It was a love of horses that had prompted him to join the SS, but his life took a fateful turn when Heinrich Himmler persuaded him to give up working at the stable and become a concentration camp guard.

On the basis of further research (including interviews with a surviving daughter of the Höss family) Harding was able to present a vivid portrait of Rudolf's development from model farmer into zealous Nazi. The stories of Hanns and Rudolf converged early in 1946 when Capt. Alexander succeeded in pressurizing Hedwig Höss into revealing where her husband was hiding. The scene describing Rudolf's arrest (followed by his trial, acknowledgement of guilt, and execution) formed the climax of a presentation that left Harding's audience enthralled. During the discussion that followed one fundamental question remained unresolved: How was it possible for an ordinary German, remembered by his daughter as 'the nicest father in the world', to evolve into a mass murderer?

After the tea break, Zahava Kohn (née Kanarek), together with her daughter Hephzibah Rudofsky (Kohn) gave a spellbound audience a most moving account of Zahava's life under Nazi persecution. Zahava was born in British



Lady Zahava Kohn (seated), from left to right: Hephzibah Rudofsky, Ann Stanton and student holding signed copy of Zahava's book: *Fragments of a Lost Childhood*

Mandate Palestine in 1935, her parents having moved to Palestine from Holland in 1935 due to the persecution of the Jews in Europe, returning to Amsterdam in 1937.

In May, 1943, the SS came for the Kanarek family and sent them to Westerbork Concentration Camp. In 1944 they were sent to Bergen-Belsen from where they were liberated in 1945. Having discovered her late mother's hidden archive of documents and memories from the war, Zahava embarked on a project to write her book, *Fragments of a Lost Childhood* (published in 2009). Documents and items such as the yellow star that Zahava was assigned as a child were shown to the audience which comprised classes from local schools with their teachers, university students and faculty, and members of the Brighton and Hove communities.

The two Holocaust Memorial Day lectures can be viewed via the Centre for German-Jewish Studies website:

[www.sussex.ac.uk/cgjs/newsandevents/news](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cgjs/newsandevents/news)

## 1945: Envisioning A New World Order

### One Day Workshop on Vision of the New World Order

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of Second World War, the Centre for German-Jewish Studies organised a workshop entitled '1945: Envisaging a new world order'. The workshop explored the plans, ideas, and visions entertained by governments, intellectuals and 'the people' about a time after the war. Interdisciplinary in its approach, philosophers, art historians and historians spent one day discussing a variety of topics ranging from philosophy after Auschwitz, the BBC's preparation for Cold War broadcasting, to the plans for Jewish resettlement after the Shoah. As diverse as these topics were, they were often fuelled by – to borrow a phrase used by Prof Paul Betts from Oxford University in his keynote speech – "magical thinking", i.e. a contemporary belief that transformative changes were necessary to prevent yet another catastrophe fuelling a wide variety of sometimes fantastical visions of the future. Few things seemed too bizarre or far-fetched not to have been contemplated in sketching out this new future, from a large number of apparitions to wide-ranging plans to secure political peace and economic prosperity by moving and removing millions of people: Germans

*continued overleaf*

## 1945: Envisioning a New World Order

continued from page 1

out of Eastern Europe, Jews out of Europe, to name just the most obvious examples.

The fascinating discussions, across disciplines, showed us yet again that under the roof of the School of History, Art History and Philosophy many of us work on similar topics that can be brought together most productively. This was the first event of its kind for the School, with a follow up already in planning for 2016.



Alban Webb, Claire Langhamer, Clive Webb and Christopher Warne pictured at the workshop

## History courses taught by members of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies

### History of Now

The module entitled 'History of Now', which is designed for first year students and also taught by members of the Centre, raises fundamental questions on the relation between the past and present. Through the lenses of three different thematic approaches (protest, economics and China) the students are encouraged to question current debates and expectations and explore key contemporary issues on the use and meaning of history today. Thus, the module reassesses the general slogan politicians and public representatives often apply to modern problems and issues: 'We have to learn from history'.

By examining the role of history in the contemporary world and academia as well as by studying the constructiveness of history, thus raising the question how historically significant scholarship is also driven by contemporary preoccupations, the module investigates the core values and problems of history as an academic discipline. In addition, the module also opens up three different themes, which many students are not aware of, and demonstrates their relevance for their lives: the student protest against university's tuition fees, the problems of economic crisis and employment in the present and the influence of Chinese products in our everyday life are just some examples of how easily the three thematic approaches can be linked to students' lives.

The module lays the ground for understanding history, its use and practice in both the past and the present, and reminds us how powerful – in a positive as well as negative way history can be.

### 1942: The history of the Holocaust

1942 has been described as 'one of the most astounding years of murder in the

whole history of mankind.' This was the year that Holocaust reached its most dramatic point. By the end of the Second World War the victims of the Holocaust amounted to millions: primarily Jews, but also, gypsies, homosexuals and disabled people. Never before in the history of modern society have a minority groups been persecuted in such an absolute and systematic manner as the Nazis did. This course studies the history of the Holocaust from three main angles:

- First it examines the routes through European and German history that led to the path of total war, antisemitism and racial persecution.
- It closely analyses the events of the Holocaust during the time of the Nazi control of Germany and Europe; the political decisions taken, how they were implemented and how they were experienced both by the victims and the perpetrators.
- It explores the way the memory of the Holocaust has developed since the war, from the initial long silences of victims and perpetrators alike, to the films, memorials and extensive debates of today on the uses and abuses of the history of the events of the Second World War.

By the end of the course students should have a good knowledge of the history of the Holocaust and a good understanding of major aspects of 20th century German, European and Jewish history. They should also be familiar with the main debates that have dominated the study of the Holocaust in recent decades.

### 1992 – Fortress Europe

In 1992 the European Economic Community was radically transformed, giving birth to the European Union. Aiming at further advancing European integration, member states were committed to collaborate and unify their approach in a large number of new policy fields, such as migration and asylum.

One tragic outcome was witnessed just a few months ago when almost 400 people drowned when their boat sank off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa. They were refugees from Africa fleeing the political and economic situation in their home countries. Facing a European Union walling off its borders, they were left with little else than embarking on a perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Those lucky enough to survive were taken to detention centres where they await their fates. Many other refugees are in similar detention centres at the borders of Europe.

This module traces how Europe has treated refugees over the past hundred years. The way in which Europe deals with large numbers of people seeking help is examined and we attempt to understand why this has often resulted in trying to keep 'outsiders' away. We explore:

- the reasons for an ever more stringent approach;
- its implementation from drafting restrictive legislation to setting up specially trained police forces guarding the borders;
- how refugees are housed and treated once they have crossed the border, legally or illegally;
- (political) self-organisation by refugees to safeguard their interest;
- the chances of being granted asylum or integrated into the host society.

In short, policies developed by the European Union paradoxically combine increased mobility for citizens within member states with a sealing-off of the borders to the outside world, creating a 'Fortress Europe' mentality.

### Genocide

Genocide, the term and the concept, was invented by Raphael Lemkin at the end of the Second World War in an attempt to comprehend the horrors of what Churchill called a 'crime without a name': the Shoah. And it was Raphael Lemkin who succeeded in getting the U.N. General Assembly to ratify the Genocide Convention in 1948 in

order to attempt to prevent similar crimes in the future. Since then the term has become widely used in public and in academic scholarship describing mass murders as far back as the Assyrian Empire. But the practice did not come to an end with the Shoah, thus turning the concept of genocide into a pivotal analytical tool in understanding the violent history of the 20th century.

The course combines an in-depth analysis of various genocides with an investigation of genocide as a generic concept. In the first part, the course examines the international discussion leading up to the adoption of the Genocide Convention and the Shoah as the event which not only shaped the specific content of the convention but also guaranteed the necessary support at the General Assembly. In the second part case studies ranging from the killing of the Herero and Nama in German South-West Africa to Darfur are analysed, focussing mainly but not exclusively on the social dynamics that lead to the mass killings, the motivation of the perpetrators and the construction of the victim groups. In the last part, the course examines and contrasts various recent definitions of what constitutes genocide exploring merits and limitations and discusses alternative concepts.

## 1938: Kristallnacht

During the night of the 9th of November 1938, SS and SA forces launched an assault on German Jews; on their property, their synagogues, and their businesses. This so-called 'Kristallnacht' can be seen as a violent rehearsal for the Holocaust which Nazi Germany proceeded to implement three years later. It also marks the end of over a century of a prolific and (mostly) peaceful co-existence between Jews and Christian non-Jews.

This module concerns the relationship between Jews and non-Jews from the early 19th century. It focuses on the complex processes of political emancipation, of social integration, and of cultural adaptation through which Jews became an integral part of the German political, social and cultural life. At the same time, these processes changed Jewish religious, economic, social and cultural life.

The main focus is on the period from the mid-19th century to the beginning of the Holocaust, examining Jewish life in imperial and Weimar Germany as well as under Nazism. Issues of Jewish identity are discussed along with aspects of modern anti-Semitism. An understanding of this history of Jewish/non-Jewish relations is studied in all its richness, alongside its problematic aspects leading up to 1938 and the Holocaust.

## 1929: Weimar Republic

1929 marks the year of the stock market crash and the further de-stabilisation of the fragile Weimar Republic. But it is also the year of the publication of Alfred Döblin's 'Berlin Alexanderplatz', one of the great works of modernist literature. This course looks at the history, politics, art and philosophy of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). In addition to reading excerpts from 'Berlin Alexanderplatz' and Christopher Isherwood's 'Goodbye to Berlin', particular attention is paid to the innovative cinema of Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau, Bertolt Brecht and Leni Riefenstahl, developments in German expressionist painting during this time, and Bauhaus architecture. Some of the seminal political and philosophical works of the period in the writings of Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger are studied. Students are thus presented with a multi-disciplinary look at some of the most important political and artistic experiments of the twentieth century and acquire invaluable background knowledge about the collapse of Weimar and the rise of National Socialism.

## First Peter Straus Memorial Lecture

Before a packed house at the Sternberg Centre, in north-west London, Professor John Röhl delivered the inaugural Peter Straus Memorial Lecture. The audience included members of Peter's family, many of his good friends and members of the congregation of the New North London Synagogue.

For many years Peter Straus was a keen supporter of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies and this event provided an opportunity for the Centre to express its appreciation of Peter's unique contribution to our work. In her opening comments, Marion Godfrey, vice-chair of the Centre's London-based Support group, described Peter's special interest and commitment to the study of the German-Jewish experience. Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg introduced

John Röhl who spoke about 'Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941): A German trauma.' Ruling Imperial Germany from his accession in 1888 to his enforced abdication in 1918 at the end of the First World War, Kaiser Wilhelm II is one of the most fascinating figures in European history. In his talk John Röhl offered a concise and accessible overview of Wilhelm's troubled youth, his involvement in social and political scandals, his growing thirst for glory, as well as the rabid antisemitism he developed in exile and his efforts to persuade Hitler to restore him to the throne. The lecture was followed by a lively discussion which provided a conclusion to a memorable event.

## Research Project Update: The Effectiveness of Holocaust Education



Kara Critchell

non-Jewish relations.

The research project itself is progressing well. Building on the established framework of the project, Kara will be visiting schools across East Sussex in the upcoming weeks to continue to observe what exactly is being taught about the Holocaust in the classroom and to note the differing approaches being adopted by schools in the area. From the pupils she has spoken to so far Dr Critchell is also acquiring a better understanding of what students themselves think about why it is important to study the Holocaust. She is looking forward to continuing this research.

Following the recent departure of Dr Caroline Sharples, who has taken up a position at the University of Central Lancashire, Dr Kara Critchell has been appointed to continue the Centre's research project into the state of Holocaust education in England. Dr Critchell is an Early Career Researcher whose doctoral research explored the role of Holocaust education in the construction and mediation of British Holocaust consciousness. Her research interests are broadly concerned with the representation of the Holocaust in education, cultural representations of Jewish immigrants and refugees and Jewish/

Alongside the Centre's research project Dr Critchell is also co-organising an interdisciplinary conference with Dr Emiliano Perra from the University of Winchester. The title of the conference is 'Encountering Perpetrators of Mass Killings, Political Violence and Genocide' and it will be held in Winchester from 1-3 September 2015. The conference will address issues surrounding the complexities of engaging with perpetrators in public memory and will confront difficult questions about how perpetrators are represented in education, museums, film, literature, war crimes trials and the media. The organisers are pleased to announce that Professor Donald Bloxham from the University of Edinburgh will give the keynote speech.

If readers have questions about the current research being undertaken into Holocaust education, or the conference being held at Winchester, please contact Kara Critchell via email at: [k.critchell@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:k.critchell@sussex.ac.uk)

## Uncomfortable Memories?

On 24 March, at a seminar hosted by the Sussex University Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research, the experience of 'Being German but not Jewish' was discussed by four German-born speakers now living in the UK. The picture that emerged was of a gradual normalization, with the anti-German attitudes of the Second World War (experienced by Sybil Oldfield while growing up as the child of a German mother and British father) giving way to the acceptance and indeed respect that Germans enjoy today in the eyes of a younger generation, not least for being so 'efficient and punctual'. The art historian Alexandra Loske, who migrated to Britain in 1997, represented a middle position. While feeling completely at home in England, knowing that her father strongly approved of her move, she was aware that members of an older generation could never forgive or forget the bombing by the RAF of non-military targets like Dresden. A year researching the testimonies of Nazi perpetrators proved so stressful that she switched to a more rewarding subject (she has been awarded a doctorate at Sussex for her art-historical study of the Brighton Royal Pavilion).

Art History is also the field of the youngest speaker, Alexandra Fliege, who confirmed

that there are fewer problems for members of her generation. But her sense of identity, too, is linked with the work she is doing on the restitution of artworks looted in the Nazi period. During the lively discussion that followed, one member of the audience asked whether Germans have any more to apologise for than British or Americans or South Africans whose nations have persecuted other peoples. Sybil Oldfield's response was that the unique wickedness of Nazi crimes has left an indelible mark on her teaching and research. Presiding over the seminar was Andrea Hammel, warmly remembered as a former Research Fellow at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, who is now Reader in German at the University of Aberystwyth. Andrea's research has foregrounded the experiences of Jewish refugees, the ones fortunate enough to get away.

## Max and Hilde Kochmann Summer School for PhD Students in European-Jewish History and Culture

19-22 July 2015, University of Sussex

The Centre for German-Jewish Studies at the University of Sussex in cooperation with the Martin Buber Chair in Jewish Thought and Philosophy at the Goethe University Frankfurt a.M. and the Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck, University of London is pleased to announce the bi-annual Max and Hilde Kochmann Summer School in European-Jewish History and Culture 2015.

The workshop aims to bring together young researchers who are currently working on topics in Jewish history, Jewish religion and inner life, literature, culture, ideological movements, inter-religious and inter-cultural relations as well as everyday life, and give them the opportunity to present and discuss their

projects in a friendly, informal atmosphere with leading scholars in the field. In doing so, the workshop wishes to build on the achievements of previous workshops and create an interdisciplinary network of younger scholars engaged in the study of areas of European-Jewish history, thought, and culture from the early modern to modern periods.

Over 35 PhD candidates from Europe, the US and Israel applied for this year's workshop and 21 students have been invited to present their work at Sussex.

The summer school programme will be announced on the Centre website and the event will be open to the public free of charge.

## Forthcoming publication



'An Austrian army awfully arrayed': the jacket design for the first complete translation of Karl Kraus's drama of the First World War, 'The Last Days of Mankind', to be published by Yale University Press in autumn 2015. The translators, Fred Bridgham and Edward Timms, define the play as the tragedy of an era bent on self-destruction by the methods of modern warfare, while still clinging to outdated ideals. Interwoven with the action are a multitude of satirical strands including bungled Austrian diplomacy, aggressive German expansionism, and the equivocal position of semi-assimilated Jews.

Copies of 'The Bird World of Auschwitz', A novella by Arno Surminski translated by Stephen C J Nicholls, are available for £5 from the Centre. Contact details below.

## Discounts on publications associated with the Centre

Publications by researchers at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies may be purchased at a discount by Friends of the Centre.

**For further information about the Centre for German-Jewish Studies and joining the Friends, please contact:**

**Diana Franklin**, Centre Manager,  
Centre for German-Jewish Studies,  
University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9QN, UK

**T** +44 (0)1273 678771 **T/F** +44 (0)20 8455 4785 (London office)  
**E** [d.franklin@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:d.franklin@sussex.ac.uk) <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cgjs>