

## Holocaust Memorial Day at the University of Sussex 2020

The University of Sussex Holocaust Memorial Day took place on February 5 2020. It was once again most generously supported by the Association of Jewish Refugees, for which support the University continues to be greatly indebted. The guiding theme for 2020 was 'We Stand Together.' The idea was to explore how genocidal regimes throughout history have deliberately fractured societies by marginalising certain groups, and how these tactics can be challenged by individuals standing together with their neighbours and speaking out against oppression. At this time the Covid-19 virus was merely a distant threat for most of us and no one in the packed lecture theatre imagined how significant the motto of the event would become just a few weeks later. As we write this report, it is still difficult to anticipate how and when the current crisis will end, and what its short- and long-term consequences will be.

The event began with a riveting lecture by Professor Ruth Wodak who explored how the children of Holocaust survivors use language to narrate the experiences of their parents. These narratives differ strikingly from those told by the survivors themselves. Although each story is unique, Wodak argued, it is nevertheless worth discussing if specific narrated experiences could be generalised to present-day contexts in order to illustrate the plights of flight



and struggle for survival.

Hannah Lewis, who was born in 1937 in Wlodawa in Poland gave a spellbound audience a moving account of her early childhood during the Nazi occupation. She spoke courageously, her voice occasionally breaking with emotion, revealing how her family were rounded up and taken to a camp in Adampol, where she witnessed her mother being killed. Her father managed to escape and joined the Partisans, before finding Hannah and living together with her in Lodz after the war. For many years Hannah did not speak about her experiences, but in recent years she has spoken widely to people of all ages. She explains: 'Holocaust and genocide

commemoration are both important to me in view of my experiences as a child - witnessing the degradation that follows such insane obsessions, and I feel the necessity to do all I can to stop this happening again anywhere in the world.'

Katya Krausova, an independent film television producer, director, exhibition curator and media consultant showed the 20-minute exhibition version of her moving full-length film entitled: 'Last Folio' documentary. For over a decade she has been producing 'Last Folio' which is a multimedia project documenting and tracing the cultural heritage of Jews from Slovakia. A stimulating discussion with the audience followed her presentation.



Hannah Lewis (on the right) with Olivia Marks-Woldman, Director of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

Over the years the University of Sussex Holocaust Memorial Day has produced talks and films of the highest quality. The feedback from the audience this year proved no exception. We live in turbulent times and we would like to use this opportunity to reiterate our steadfast commitment to the commemoration, the teaching and to the research of the Holocaust. The coronavirus is indeed frightening but let us not forget that the worst viruses in history have been evil ideas that have taken over states, societies and cultures. In this sense the Holocaust Memorial Day is more important today than ever before. It is a wake-up call to the public and the elites, urging all of us not to lose sight of a path that will guarantee a better future for all of us.

Marc Sugarman, Trustee of The Bloom Foundation, whose most significant local project is the redevelopment of 29-31 New Church Road, to revitalise the Jewish community in Brighton and Hove and build a state-of-the-art centre for the local community, sent us the following message the day after the event:

*Dear Friends*

*The Holocaust Memorial Day you organized this week was truly outstanding – I could see how much effort, care and wisdom went into creating something so inspirational and powerful. Thank you so much for inviting me and I honestly felt totally humbled to be sitting next to His Excellency Michael Zimmermann and Hella Pick.*

*All three presentations were excellent. Ruth Wodak's subject matter was fascinating and her work insightful. Hannah Lewis' talk was among the most moving I have ever heard; at 83 may we all be so articulate and inspirational! I thought the movie and Katya's question and answer session were also extremely interesting. The work that you do in conveying the message 'stand together' and to ensure that we remember the victims of the Holocaust and do everything possible to ensure we can learn from horrific events, is extremely important.*

*Marc Sugarman (BA Oxon, ACA)*

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## **Filip Vasilijevic, President of the University of Sussex Students' Union delivered the following speech as part of the opening panel before the commencement of the programme:**

Dear guests, speakers and organisers, thank you for being part of this event today, and commemorating what we may never forget.

The Holocaust was a specific attempt by the Nazi regime to exterminate Jews from Europe. As part of it many groups suffered, including the Romas, the LGBTQ+ community, Jehovah's Witnesses and Black and Ethnic Minorities.

When the Nazis took power in 1933, they used a campaign based on propaganda, persecution and lies to justify the violation of human rights of European Jews. This resulted in six million members of the community being murdered.

Over 80 years later, we are seeing some similar trends starting to emerge across the world. We have seen a massive rise of far-right nationalism around the globe. This includes tension brewing between countries and othering of minority groups in western Europe. Even Finland, one of the countries that is lauded as one of the most liberal and progressive in modern society saw far-right nationalists marching openly in the street with swastikas and Nazi flags in 2019.

This is why events like this are so important. Holocaust Memorial Day impresses upon us the importance of learning from the past so that we do not repeat it.

We, the young people, need to reflect upon what has happened and strive to do better. We must pledge not just to be bystanders when we see injustice. Edmund Burke said: 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'

I understand it takes a lot of courage to speak up when we witness oppression, but we owe it to our predecessors. And that burden should be shared with our educators and families, in order to equip us with tools to make this world a better, safer place for everyone.

I am going to leave you with a poem that you may well be familiar with, but is always worth remembering:



*First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a socialist.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

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## **Congratulations to Advisory Board Members**

The 2020 New Year's Honours List marked Britain's most far-reaching tribute yet to Holocaust survivors and educators, with almost thirty names from all over the country recognised for their contribution to preserving memories of the Shoah. The Centre for German-Jewish Studies warmly congratulates two members of its Advisory Board – Lilian Levy on being awarded the MBE and Peter Summerfield upon the award of the British Empire Medal for services to Holocaust Education and Awareness. We also congratulate Marianne Summerfield, wife of Peter, for being awarded the British Empire Medal.

## 'German-Jewish Agency in Times of Crisis, 1914–1938', 18-19 February 2020, University of Sussex

The conference 'German-Jewish Agency in Times of Crisis, 1914–1938' took place on 18 and 19 February 2020 at the University of Sussex. It was organised by David Jünger (Sussex Weidenfeld Institute of Jewish Studies), Miriam Rürup (Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg) Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Centre for Research on Antisemitism) and Anna Ullrich (Centre for Holocaust Studies, Munich). The conference was set to explore the scale of political agency of German Jewry during the first half of the twentieth century. Were German Jews during this period able to pursue an independent policy vis-à-vis a hostile environment, or are they to be understood primarily as victims? Or should we even go as far as to call the German Jews, particularly in the years up to 1933, as accomplices of German crimes in the First World War and protagonists of German nationalism, racism and colonialism, as has been looked at in recent research?

As David Jünger pointed out in his introductory remarks: contemporary scholarship tends to focus on choices instead of coercion, thus placing 'new emphasis on Jewish agency.' The conference's call was not to promote 'agency' further as a new agenda for German-Jewish history, but rather to examine it critically. And in doing so, to re-evaluate the place of Jews in German history. Throughout the two days of the conference, topics as diverse as theoretical consideration on the concept of (Jewish) agency, the First World War, Zionism as Identity Politics, Jewish consumer culture, photography as agency, the Evian conference of 1938 and Jewish agency in the extreme situation of concentration camp imprisonment were discussed.

Closing the first day of the conference, Michael Berkowitz (UCL London) delivered a keynote



Prof. Michael Berkowitz delivers the keynote address at the conference entitled: 'Improvisation and agency: Between art history, photography, and public history'

lecture on the emigration of the Warburg Institute to London in 1933. Its relocation, Berkowitz pointed out, was largely due to the diplomatic genius of the institute's director, Fritz Saxl, who managed to frame its universalistic approach within the British landscape of higher education. Berkowitz maintained, however, that the Warburg Institute remains largely underappreciated as a refugee driven institution of historic relevance.

After two intensive days of presentations and various debates, there seemed to be little agreement on what agency, at its core, really meant. For all its promises, the conference's participants stated severe doubts on the analytical potentials of agency. However well-intended the empowering appeal of agency might be, the focus on Jewish choices stood at risk of neglecting the circumstances in which they were made. But ultimately, the conference was not about agreeing on a specific understanding of agency. Instead, the concept facilitated a debate on the analytical directions of the field. (Report by Robert Mueller-Stahl)

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## PhD Project: 'People from Paper: Jewish Belonging through the Prism of German Registration and Census-taking 1812-1943'

**Stefan Boberg**

I commenced my PhD project in September 2016 at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, and I am greatly indebted to the Bader philanthropies scholarship that has enabled me to carry out my research. My thesis explores German concepts of citizenship by analysing how the authorities gathered and curated information about the population in general, and the Jewish population in particular. I analyse the status of Jews in registration documentation in state and national statistics from the inclusion of Jews in the state collective in the 1812 census to their exclusion from the People's Community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) by deportation and subsequent murder under National-Socialist rule in the 1940s.

The long-term approach and the unique perspective adopted by my study elucidates how the concept of German citizenship evolved using the example of Germany's Jews. Over the course of more than a century, census categories and population registers not only reflected these conceptual changes but were eventually used to alter the composition of the German population. That the 1939 census investigated Jewish ancestry is a well-known fact, however its significance for the identification of individual Jews in the context of deportations and the Shoah has been disputed. My thesis argues that a population register introduced in 1939 – the People's Card Index (*Volkskartei*) – was essential in order to identify German Jews. In consulting new sources, it shows that the collation of the census data on ancestry with the *Volkskartei* was ordered in March 1941 to facilitate the identification and localisation of German Jews in order to facilitate deportations. It shows in detail how the National-Socialist conception of the *Volksgemeinschaft* by exclusion depended on documents and bureaucracy rather than merely on vague notions of 'race' or 'blood'.

# The Marie Jahoda Study Trip Programme to Vienna

In the autumn of 2018, the Republic of Austria granted the University of Sussex a generous financial gift towards the establishment of the Sussex Weidenfeld Institute of Jewish Studies. The grant is designed to reinforce the University's working relations with Austrian academics, and in so doing, to strengthen our academic offering on Austrian history and culture with a specific emphasis on the history and experience of Jews and other Austrians during the 20th century.

At the core of this enterprise is a set of two study trips to Vienna, one of which took place in 2019 and the second which will take place in 2020. The plan is to take groups of up to twenty undergraduate students on a journey in time, from the imperial period of the pre-1914 years, through the interwar period, to the post Second World War epoch. The course provides insight into the transformation of Austria from a multinational Empire to a nation state, analysing what drove these transformations, with a view to identifying specific themes of overall importance.

During the first trip, students visited places of historic importance in Vienna. They explored the city with guided tours, visits to museums and memorial sites and held seminars at various locations. The excursion encouraged students to think about the importance of locality in history, broaching the central question of 20th Century history and situating the Austrian experience within a wider European framework.

We decided to name the Study Visit programme 'the Marie Jahoda - Austria in the 20th Century Programme' in memory of her important contributions. Born in Vienna to a Jewish merchant's family, Jahoda was forced to leave Austria after receiving her PhD in psychology from the University of Vienna. In 1937, she arrived in the UK and in the year 1965 she was appointed Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Sussex. Given her seminal career, which focused on understanding the psychology of social phenomena including discrimination and antisemitism, and her Austrian heritage, we felt that this to be a fitting designation.

Student Testimonies (a selection):

*Being in Vienna made the things that we were learning about less abstract as we were actually in the places that we were talking about.*

*I found it interesting to learn about Austria of which I had no previous knowledge.*

*Great opportunity to experience Austria and*



Students visiting the Austrian Parliament with Martin Engelberg, Austrian MP, 4th from the left.

*learn about its history.*

*Being a country's history that I and many of my other classmates had never studied, the trip really helped me form my own opinions and helped me put events into context.*

*Going to Austria... gave me an in depth understanding about how the general perception [of Austria] and how it has changed over time. This is something which we would not have been able to understand from books alone.*

*While it was very jam-packed and honestly exhausting, it was so much fun and it was also very educational.*

*Great experience, in particular the guided museum tours (especially the interactive ones) were really interesting.*

*The tour of the Austrian Parliament was really good and the chance to question a working Austrian Politician was an eye-opening experience, as it gave an insight into the workings of the Austrian Government today.*

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## Research Papers

The Centre for German-Jewish Studies will publish two research papers this year and complimentary copies will be sent to Friends of the Centre:

1. 'An Interview with Professor Julius Carlebach (1922- 2001)' by Dr Bea Lewkowicz
2. 'Edward Francis Timms a Memoir' by Professor Ritchie Robertson

Please look at our website: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cgjs/>  
As soon as the current pandemic has receded, we will resume our events.