

OBITUARIES



LADISLAUS LÖB

Born: 8 May 1933, Cluj, Romania
Died: 2 October 2021, Zürich, Switzerland.

Ladislaus (Laci) Löb, one of the last Professors of German at Sussex University, was a distinguished scholar of the literature of the German Enlightenment and an accomplished translator from Hungarian and German; Laci will also be remembered for his first-hand accounts of the Nazi extermination of Romanian and Hungarian Jewry and of the 'luck' of his own survival.

His book *Dealing with Satan* (2008), draws on the testimony of other survivors as well as his own and provides a well-researched and balanced defence of Kasztner, who was later assassinated and who remains an incendiary figure in some quarters. Laci regularly spoke to Sussex students - telling them how he and his father became part of the so-called 'Kasztner group' of around 1,600 Jews who were given safe passage out of Hungary thanks to a deal between Nazi officials and the Zionist leader Rezső Kasztner, whose course of action after Budapest was occupied by the Nazis, still stirs much controversy.

Throughout his life Laci was grateful to Kasztner for saving his life and he emphasised this time and again. In 1963, after a brief career as a teacher and journalist in Switzerland, he came to England to teach German literature and language at the University of Sussex, where he remained until his retirement. Talking with Laci, on and off campus, gave the liberating sense of moving between and across cultures and languages: 'having been born a Romanian and Hungarian citizen, I am now Swiss and British by naturalisation.' After his retirement from Sussex, Laci kept close contact with the Centre for German Jewish Studies. Laci's sense of humour always impressed those who encountered him, but he also knew how to use his wit as a powerful device to make young people think about the past.

When talking to students he used to tell them about his final train journey from Bergen-Belsen to safety in Switzerland. He depicted this trip as a passage from darkness to light, remarking that this was meant not only metaphorically. In fear of air bombing, Laci used to explain, the German side of the border was dark while the Swiss illuminated their cities to signal to Allies bombers not to attack them. His was an extraordinary life and he was an extraordinary man.

Alistair Davies and Nicolas Tredell

JOHN HOWARD IZBICKI

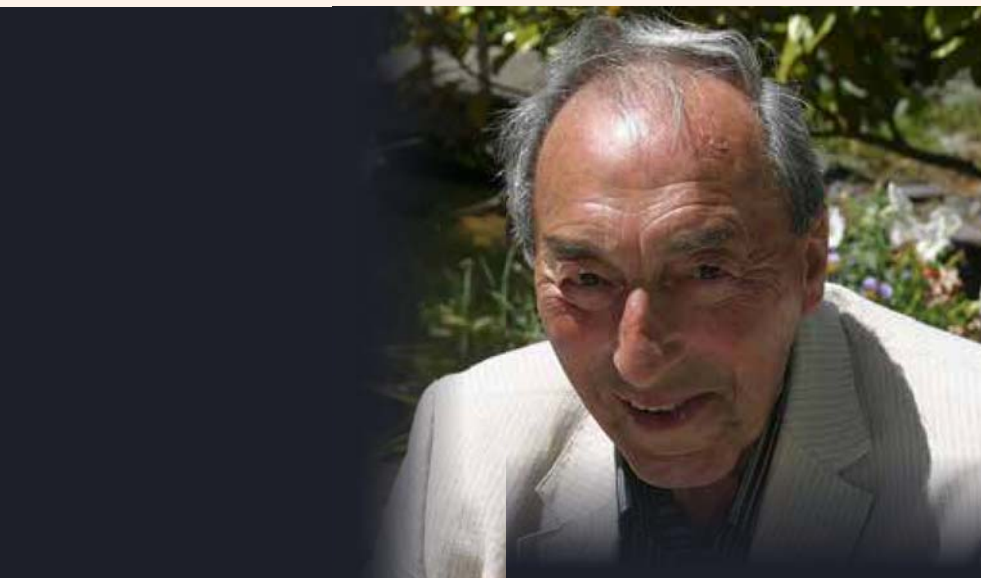
Born: 8 November 1930, Berlin
Died: 9 December 2021, Kent

John's vivid memories of Kristallnacht have featured in AJR memorial services and education programmes and, after coming to England, he is perhaps best remembered as the *Daily Telegraph* education correspondent.

Nine-year-old Horst escaped with his parents to this country, just in the nick of time, the day war broke out on 3 September 1939. He had screamed so much when Nazis broke the family Berlin haberdashery window that his voice was permanently damaged.

Soon he changed his name to John after the son of a police sergeant in Oxfordshire who had shown kindness. The family settled in Manchester where John went to North Manchester Grammar School, enjoying amateur dramatics and sports. He gained a distinction in English in his Higher School Certificate despite not being able to speak a word of the language 10 years earlier! He was awarded a scholarship and went to Nottingham University to read German and French; the course also involved spending time in Germany which whetted his appetite for further spells abroad both for studying and work.

John remained loyal to his alma mater and was only too willing to help there as he also did elsewhere. Many years later, during the mid-seventies, I first came across John at the university convocation when he was on the platform debating with Lord Crowther Hunt, the Education Minister, and he made a lasting impression.



Renowned in Fleet Street, he started his journalism career after National Service in the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) in Egypt and the Middle East, specialising in education, entertainments and public relations. After demobilisation he became a graduate journalism trainee in Manchester, meeting Matt Busby, Manager of Manchester United while touring night clubs looking for stories for his diary column. Soon he was posted to Paris by the Kemsley group where his line manager was Ian Fleming of James Bond fame and he drank coffee with François Mitterrand and Françoise Sagan. He cultivated prestigious newspaper and social contacts and got to know his first wife Maureen Ryan whom he married in the British Embassy in Paris in December 1959. Their son Paul was born in 1964 but tragically Maureen died of cancer aged only 42. Later he met June Gordon-Walker, a teacher, they were married in 1986; he was devoted to her two children Anna and Patrick.

He had joined the *Daily Telegraph* and remained there for 23 years, heading the education department for 18 years, and always had a good relationship with the teaching unions. But after interviewing eight education secretaries, including Sir Keith Joseph, Shirley Williams and Kenneth Baker, he tired of the role. His urbane charm enabled him to rescue Margaret Thatcher from a drunken journalist by asking her to dance and afterwards admire Scarborough beach by moonlight. He said of the various Ministers of Education he knew, she stood out as the best. Soon he found himself back in France

as "Our man in Paris" and always spoke affectionately of his life there. Later he was public affairs director to the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics and played a leading part in transforming the country's polytechnics to "new universities". In retirement he continued to write education columns and spearheaded schools' Holocaust educational work and adopted a leading part in the community where he lived in Horsmonden.

His autobiography *Life Between the Lines* was finished when he was 80, by which time he'd led such a full life he agonised about what to leave out. National papers picked up in particular on his experiences in Nazi Germany and flight to England and he never forgot his childhood under fascism. He also paid tribute to the tragic fate of all those who died under the Nazis, including his grandmother who died of starvation in Theresienstadt and many other relatives who perished. June helped him check the work and compile an index. They were both familiar figures at regional Tunbridge Wells AJR meetings where John was a willing and able contributor. Unfailingly courteous, he always had something apposite to say and enlivened a debate. His quick intelligence, ready wit and gift for imitating people in the nicest possible way shone through.

He leaves June, Paul, Patrick, Anna, and grandchildren Tyler, Chloe, Artie and Luke.

Janet Weston

LOOKING FOR?

POST WAR DP TRANSPORTS

A photograph published in Germany ('Rail Klassik No. 3') shows details of special trains or carriages for groups of Displaced Persons departing Munich in December 1947 for Paris, Münster, Innsbruck - and eventual destinations Palestine, America and England. Rabbi Dr. Walter Rothschild is keen to hear from anyone with knowledge of these transports.

Rothschild-Berlin@t-online.de

ALBERT PALACHE & NELLY PALACHE-BONDY

Historian Arno van Beurden seeks information and memories about city banker Albert Palache, born Amsterdam 1888, died London 1958, and his spouses. His second wife was Nelly Palache-Bondy of Prague and Vienna.

AJPvanBeurden@gmail.com

REFUGEES IN WIMBLEDON

The Wimbledon Society Local History Group seeks information about refugees who were given sanctuary in the Wimbledon area, including details of how they were welcomed by the community. Two such refugees were Annie Woolf-Skinner and her sister.

normansmit21@yahoo.co.uk

PIONEER CORPS

AJEX archivist Martin Sugarman seeks information on two German Jewish refugees who served in the Pioneer Corps in WW2 and were killed: Major P. Ritinitis (aka Weinberger), Intelligence Corps, buried at Mejdes el Bab, and Peter Kahn/Khan, buried Escoublac, Brittany, SS *Lancastria*, 17 June 1940.

martin.sugarman@yahoo.co.uk

MUSICAL NOTES

Ann Antrich has three notebooks handwritten in 1916-17 by her great-uncle Kurt Wolff. The notes are on classical music by famous composers; some have Jewish connections. She does not read German so, if any AJR member is interested in looking at the notebooks, please contact her.

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