

Testaments to the Holocaust

Series Three: The Henriques Archive from the Wiener Library, London

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Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library (London, 1997)

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TESTAMENTS TO THE HOLOCAUST

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

Primary Source Microfilm is proud to present *Testaments to the Holocaust*. This microfilm edition contains the papers of Rose Henriques, from the Wiener Library, London. The Henriques Archive (as this collection is commonly known) offers extraordinary insights into the life of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and their first steps back into life and community. The archive comprises the working papers of Rose Henriques from 1945 to 1950, when she served as head of the Germany Section of the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad (JCRA) and led one of the Jewish Relief Units (JRU) into the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen.

The microfilm collection is accompanied by a comprehensive index. Available in both digital and hardback paper formats, this index will open the contents of the Wiener Library archives to closer inspection than has hitherto been possible, making rare and unique historical material available to a wider public. Taken together, the materials assembled here provide the basis for studying the immediate post-War period in Germany and the reconstruction of Jewish life.

Along with acknowledgements for the help and co-operation extended by the staff of the Wiener Library, a special thank you is due to Ben Barkow whose comprehensive knowledge and generous advice have very substantially contributed to the preparation of the collection for publication.

Justine Williams
History Editor
Primary Source Microfilm
Reading, UK

TECHNICAL NOTE

Primary Source Microfilm has set itself the highest standards in the field of archivally-permanent library microfilming. Our microfilm publications conform to the recommendations of the guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice and meet the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the printed material and manuscript documents within the collection. These sometimes consist of articles, records and correspondence printed or written with a variety of inks and pens and on paper which has become severely discoloured or stained which renders the original document difficult to read. Occasionally volumes have been tightly bound and this leads to text loss. Such inherent characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Users of the microfilm should be aware that the numbering sequence for the documents herein is for internal reference at the Wiener Library and does not relate to the number of documents in this microfilm edition.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

The Wiener Library is the oldest institution in the world established for the task of documenting the Nazi regime and its crimes against the Jewish people.

The founder, Alfred Wiener (1885-1964) was a German Jew, born in Potsdam, who had studied Arabic literature to doctorate level, and spent the years 1907-9 travelling in the Middle East. This experience persuaded him that the Zionist ideal was misplaced and that efforts to establish a national homeland for the Jews could only prove damaging to the Jews (naturally he altered his views later, enjoying friendly relations with former political enemies and even, for a time, pondering whether the Wiener Library should not move to Jerusalem).

After serving in the First World War (in the course of which he was decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class) he became increasingly perturbed by the theories of extreme right-wing anti-Semitic groups in Germany. He joined the largest Jewish civil rights organisation, the conservative and anti-Zionist Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), and devoted himself to the task of enlightening the German people about the dangers of right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism. Within a few years he had risen to a very high position in the organisation and was closely involved in formulating its policy. From 1925 onwards Wiener was in no doubt that the greatest danger from the far right was from the National Socialists under Hitler. He directed most of his efforts towards combating the Nazi threat.

As part of this work Wiener was involved in an initiative in 1928 to set up an office to collect all available information about the Nazi Party, its leaders and its activities. The office was called Büro Wilhelmstrasse, after the main street in Berlin's government district. The Büro Wilhelmstrasse collected newspapers, journals, pamphlets, leaflets and ephemeral matter produced by or relating to the Nazis, and used these as the basis for campaigns against the Nazis. Typical is a sticker featuring a cartoon of Hitler and the words 'Die Nazis sind unser Unglück!' (the Nazis are our misfortune!), parodying the Nazi slogan 'Die Juden sind unser Unglück!' (the Jews are our misfortune!). In the few years of its existence the archive amassed a collection of about 200,000 items and was probably the largest collection of material about the Nazis in existence at the time.

With Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, the Büro was closed down and its materials sent into hiding in Bavaria. It is presumed that the collection was lost or destroyed during the Second World War.

For Wiener, Hitler's *Machtergreifung* was a personal crisis. After suffering a sort of nervous collapse he made plans to go into exile. In the summer of 1933 he and his family moved to Amsterdam. There he met Professor David Cohen, a leading member

of the city's Jewish community, and together they formulated plans to set up what became known as the Jewish Central Information Office (JCIO).

The task of the JCIO was essentially similar to that of its predecessor the Büro Wilhelmstrasse. From early 1934 it issued a stream of publications, some substantial, the majority short mimeographed reports on particular issues or events. In addition the office produced in-depth responses to three events: the Bern trial of distributors of the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the murder of the Swiss Nazi leader Wilhelm Gustloff by a young Jewish medical student, David Frankfurter and the Pogrom of 9/10 November 1938, the so-called Kristallnacht.

Following Kristallnacht the JCIO came under mounting pressure from the Dutch government to limit its activities. For Wiener and Cohen this was a warning that the JCIO's days in Amsterdam were numbered. In spring 1939 Wiener came to London and began the preparations for bringing the Office to safety. It eventually opened its doors at 19 Manchester Square, London on 1 September 1939.

Several members of the staff, including Wiener's wife, remained in Amsterdam, becoming stranded there after the German invasion in April 1940. Kurt Zielenziger, Wiener's Deputy, Bernard Krieg, the JCIO's book-keeper and Wiener's wife and children were eventually arrested and taken to the transit camp Westerbork before being deported to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. Zielenziger and Krieg died there. Although Margarethe Wiener and the children survived and were freed in a prisoner exchange in January 1945, Mrs Wiener was so weakened by her time in Belsen that she died within hours of crossing the border to Switzerland.

Wiener himself spent the war years in the United States of America. According to one source, he suffered a renewed nervous collapse after the outbreak of war, and was determined to get out of Europe. With the invasion of the Netherlands the JCIO's supply lines of materials from Germany were for the most part cut off. Wiener established new ones in the USA and also worked for British government agencies. The Office in London was left in the care of his new Deputy Louis Bondy.

The work of the JCIO in London concentrated on supplying information to various government departments such as the Ministry of Information, the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, and the BBC. It also assisted London-based governments in exile and continued to offer its resources to Jewish organisations worldwide. In addition it issued two periodicals, *The Nazis at War* and *Jewish News*, which featured compilations of extracts from publications and press reports about political developments in Germany and the occupied territories.

It was in London that the name-change from JCIO to Wiener Library came about. The cause was the reluctance of the ministries and offices which used the JCIO to use a name that highlighted the specifically Jewish nature of the organisation. Instead the Office was euphemistically called 'Dr Wiener's Library' and eventually this name became the accepted one, even within the Office itself. After the war, when the work of the JCIO became increasingly academic the new name seemed more fitting and was officially adopted in the form Wiener Library.

During the late 1940s and 50s the Library devoted itself to a number of tasks: assisting the prosecution of war criminals at Nuremberg, helping individuals with restitution claims (for many years the Library had a lawyer on its staff), and collecting eyewitness accounts of what eventually became known as the Holocaust. From 1946 it issued the *Wiener Library Bulletin*, which became a renowned forum for news about research, books and news items relating to the Nazi era, German neo-Nazism, the Holocaust and all matters to do with right-wing extremism in Europe. The Library also carried out detailed monitoring of the German Austrian press, publishing the weekly *Auszüge aus der deutschen und österreichischen Presse* from 1948 (this publication is not included in *Testaments to the Holocaust*).

Alfred Wiener died in 1964 and was replaced as Director by Walter Laqueur, a young and ambitious academic who broadened the range of the Library's activities and interests and made it the forum for a series of lectures and international conferences which were of fundamental importance to the development of the academic study of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. The Library also sponsored original research into topics such as the November Pogrom, the persecution of Gypsies under the Nazis, and the Nazi use of propaganda. Much of this research led to publications which remain standard works.

Yet Laqueur's many achievements were set against the background of a steadily weakening financial position. By the mid-1970s the situation was so desperate that outside help was needed. This came from the University of Tel Aviv, which part-funded the Library for five years and eventually gave a secure home to a large part of its book collection.

For several years after 1980 the Library's focus was on fund-raising and re-building the collection. By 1990 the financial situation had been stabilised and the collection was back to full strength. Throughout the 1990s the emphasis, under the new Director, David Cesarani, has been to re-establish the Library's credentials as an academic institution of international renown. This has been achieved by means of twice-yearly lecture series and a string of major international conferences on topics including the Final Solution, the Holocaust in Hungary, De-Nazification, the Holocaust and British museums, representations of the Holocaust, and the reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe after the war.

Today the Library serves a readership comprising academic researchers, writers, broadcasters, the media, students and youngsters studying the Holocaust at school. Survivors and their families make use of its resources to trace family history, to study the history of towns and villages where they had their origins and the ghettos and camps where so many of their loved-ones perished.

Taken together the materials assembled in the *Testaments to the Holocaust* series provide the basis for studying Nazi Germany and its crimes against the Jews from many perspectives. It does not offer answers but rather a wealth of raw materials for students to explore and work with in their effort to reach their own conclusions. Complemented by

appropriate secondary literature the collection offers outstanding opportunities to gain insights into one of the darkest periods of human history.

The Rose Henriques Collection

The Henriques Archive comprises the working papers of Rose Henriques from 1945 to 1950, when she served as head of the Germany Section of the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad (JCRA) and led one of the Jewish Relief Units (JRU) into the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen.

Rose Henriques

Rose Louise Loewe was born in London in 1889, the daughter of James Loewe, a well-known figure in Jewish communal life. Her brother Herbert achieved standing as Reader in Rabbinics at Cambridge University.

Rose Loewe's childhood was marked by prosperity, piety and a love of the arts. Her particular interest was music, and she performed regularly on the harmonium at her synagogue in St John's Wood, London.

Intent on a career in music she travelled to Germany to study piano in Breslau. Returning at the outbreak of the First World War she met Basil Henriques, who persuaded her to join him in a venture to establish a Jewish boys' club in the East End of London. The Oxford and St. George's Club dominated the lives of the couple for decades. Rose Loewe initially took charge of the girls' section of the club, eventually managing the boys' section as well when Basil Henriques went off to do his patriotic duty. The couple married in 1916.

Increasingly devoted to a career in social work, broadly understood, Rose Henriques became a VAD nurse at Liverpool Street Station in London during the War.

Rose and Basil Henriques lived on the premises of their club, first in Betts Street, and from 1930 in Berner Street, where new premises were built with a £65,000 grant from the tobacco magnate Bernhard Baron. The home was renamed The Bernhard Baron St. George's Settlement. From this base they undertook very wide-ranging welfare work, involving not only youth work but mother and baby welfare, help for the aged, and the promotion of education, participation in Jewish religious life and in the arts. Among the East End children she worked with she was affectionately known as 'The Missus'. Berner Street was eventually renamed Henriques Street in the couple's honour.

The Nazi persecution of Germany's and Europe's Jews roused the interest and compassion of Rose Henriques at an early stage. In 1943 she found an opportunity to become actively involved in planning for the end of the war by joining the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad (JCRA) which was established by the Joint Foreign Committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews (the same Joint Foreign Committee had called the Jewish Central Information Office into being in 1933). The JCRA had as one its chief goals the establishment of the Jewish

Relief Unit (JRU) – an active service unit for carrying out welfare work among the surviving remnant of European Jewry in Germany. Rose Henriques served as Head of the Germany Department of the JCRA.

British troops entered the notorious Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on 15 April 1945. The first JRU team arrived there on 21 June 1945. Rose Henriques arrived with the second team a short while after and based herself in the nearby town of Celle. A third team arrived in August 1945.

Welfare work with Displaced Persons (DPs) in the British Zone of Occupation occupied Rose Henriques until 1950 when Bergen-Belsen was closed down and most Jewish DPs emigrated to the newly-founded state of Israel or to the USA.

In the post-war era Rose Henriques became actively involved in the British ORT organisation (ORT are the Russian initials of the Society for Spreading Artisan and Agricultural Work Among Jews), serving as Chair of the British OSE Society (OSE are the Russian initials for the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews), establishing the Workrooms for the Elderly in east London and presiding over the League of Jewish Women, the Association for the Welfare of the Physically Handicapped, the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the Jewish Research Unit – among many others.

When Basil Henriques was knighted in 1955, Rose became Lady Henriques. In 1964 she was honoured with the Henrietta Szold Award and in 1971, a year before her death, she was appointed a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Belsen as a Displaced Persons' Camp

At the end of the Second World War Germany was placed under military government and divided into four occupation zones, British, French, Soviet and American. The British Zone of Occupation comprised Schleswig Holstein, North Rhine-Westphalia (Nordrhein-Westfalen), Lower Saxony and the Hanseatic city of Hamburg.

In Germany as a whole there were around 13 million people in the care of the authorities, in the British Zone around two million. Most of these Displaced Persons (DPs) had been forced labourers, deportees, stateless persons, concentration camp survivors and former prisoners of war.

Allied policy was to repatriate people as quickly as possible – by the end of July 1945 some 3.2 million had been returned to their country of origin. In many cases, however, repatriation was not straightforward. Many DPs did not want to be repatriated, either for fear of new political regimes in their homelands or because – as in the case of the Jews – their former homes were seen as little more than the graveyards of families and friends. For Jewish survivors, decisions to refuse repatriation were of course also arrived at through commitment to the Zionist cause. Such people were defined by the authorities as 'non-repatriables' and in the British Zone Belsen was a major centre for their accommodation.

Belsen was the largest concentration camp in the British Zone. It is reported that at liberation it housed approximately 60,000 people, roughly half of them Jewish. Many of the inmates were survivors of death marches from other camps to the east. During the first weeks after liberation many thousands died of exhaustion, starvation, sudden over-eating or disease. In addition, approximately 17,000 were repatriated to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia, leaving around 12,000, the majority of whom were Jewish. An indication of how significant Belsen was for Jewish life in the British Zone is that its population represented roughly one half of all the Jews surviving in the Zone. In the years after 1945 it became a great centre of Jewish renewal and dominated Jewish life in the British Zone.

The number of people housed in the camp held steady over a long period, although survivors departed for Palestine (often illegally) and new refugees arrived. British policy was not to allow Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union and other eastern countries into the Zone. Belsen's comparative demographic stability strengthened it as a centre of Jewish political and cultural life.

While the British authorities envisaged the DP camp at Belsen as a provisional measure, in fact it closed only in 1950. The chief reason for this extended existence was the inability or refusal of Jewish survivors to 'return' to what the British defined as their country of origin. Many Jews perceived themselves as 'liberated but not free' and felt passionately that freedom would only come when they were able to settle in a Jewish national homeland in Palestine.

Two distinct groups of Jewish survivors are discernible: young, unmarried people who for the most part originated in Poland and other eastern European countries, and German Jews who were predominantly elderly. From early on, the young Jewish DPs embarked on relationships and marriages and many children were born in Belsen. This also tended to make for demographic stability within the camp.

Living conditions in the camp were poor. Initially the authorities could only provide a diet of c.2,000 calories per day (the World Health Organisation today calculates that 2,400 calories per day are needed to maintain health). The economies of Germany and the UK were in extremely poor condition - and to make matters worse the winter of 1946-7 was harsh.

The younger Polish and eastern European Jews in Belsen were predominantly Zionists who aspired to create a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. This shared conviction gave strong impetus to political organisation and activity. A Jewish committee was elected soon after liberation to promote the interests of the DPs. In September a Central Jewish Committee was established, with Josef Rosensaft as its Chair. The Committee created numerous departments dealing with issues such as health, culture, education, economics and religion.

For the JRU the situation was challenging, because the Jewish DPs were politically at odds with the British authorities over the issues of Jewish nationality and Palestine. The British sought to treat German Jews as Germans first and Jews second, and resisted the

segregation of Jewish DPs from other groups. This led to strong opposition from the Jewish side, particularly from the Central Committee.

A number of Jewish bodies were active in the British Zone of Occupation, including the American Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint), the Jewish Brigade, ORT and others. The JRU worked to co-ordinate the activities of these bodies and maintain productive co-operation between them. The JRU itself avoided taking political positions, and sought to mediate between Zionists and non-Zionists, the Orthodox and the secular, and all the other interest groups represented. While many JRU workers were Zionists themselves and eventually made new lives in the state of Israel, the JCRA took the position that a continued Jewish life in Germany was a worthwhile and legitimate goal.

The rich and complex social, political, cultural and religious life of the DP camp at Bergen-Belsen emerges from the papers of the Rose Henriques Collection. The Collection came to the Wiener Library some time after the death of Lady Henriques, when her office in Henriques Street was being cleared. Herbert Loewe contacted Chief Librarian Christa Wichmann, who arranged for the three filing cabinets containing the working papers amassed by Lady Henriques to be transported across London.

For many years the collection was stored in these cabinets and no finding aids were available. Although used by a few scholars, the condition of the papers meant that they could not be made freely available. In 1997 grants were awarded by the National Manuscript Conservation Trust, the Kessler Foundation and a number of private donors to improve the storage of the collection and prepare a finding aid. Ruth Shackleton Levy, a qualified conservator with a strong interest in the work of the Wiener Library, undertook the work.

Her final report specifies that the papers were transferred to acid-free containers, maintaining the original file sequence 1 - 21 (Section 22 was created to house some additional papers). Within each file papers have been arranged in date order. The archive also provides an example of how the numbering system works, see:

HA1-3/5/33B/r = Henriques Archive Section 1/Box3/folder 5/page 33/sub-sectionB/recto.

The papers of the Rose Henriques Collection offer extraordinary insights into the life of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and their first steps back into life and community. Any student of the immediate post-war period in Germany – and particularly of the reconstruction of Jewish life – must be grateful that Lady Henriques preserved her working papers and allowed the information contained in them to be transmitted to future generations.

Ben Barkow
General Editor

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The Bremen Murder Trial

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Further Evidence Collected by JRU Legal Department

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Attack on Jewish Club in Celle, 1947
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