Arrival Cities

Roth, Helene, Lee, Rachel, Karp Lugo, Laura, Hetschold, Mareike, Dogramaci, Burcu

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Not so long ago if one walked from Swiss Cottage – also known as ‘Schweizer Häuschen’ – to the John Barnes store, one could hear along the way Yiddish and every Middle European language. The Finchley Road was the main thoroughfare for thousands of Continental Jews who had managed to escape from the Nazis. But time will do what Hitler could not. The generation that got away is gradually disappearing. (Buruma n.d.)

By the early 1940s a staggering 25,000 “aliens” lived in Hampstead and its surrounds, i.e. about 45 per cent of the local population. What Louis MacNiece called “the guttural sorrow of the refugees” pervaded the district – people as noticeable for their looks and accents as any other immigrant group, and often similarly welcome. (Canetti 2005, 13)

**Introduction**

Hampstead (NW3), a leafy, affluent and historic residential area occupying an elevated position in north west London, has long been celebrated for its intellectual, liberal and cultural associations. It also became, during the 1930s, well-known as a significant site of interchange for British and continental modernism. Notable exponents included British artists Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Ben Nicholson – critic Herbert Read’s so-called ‘nest of gentle artists’ – as well as Roland Penrose, and his American-born wife Lee Miller; the continentals included Russian Naum Gabo, Dutchman Piet Mondrian, German Bauhäusler Walter Gropius and
Marcel Breuer – housed in Wells Coates’ Isokon building in Lawn Road, together with Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy – and fellow Hungarian, Ernő Goldfinger, who designed his own home at 2 Willow Road. As Czech émigré art historian and critic, Prof. J.P. Hodin, resident of nearby Belsize Park, observed:

[...] no other London Borough can pride itself upon such an influx of top brains in science and the arts. These new arrivals having fled the political holocaust on the continent in the thirties, acted as a powerful catalyst in their new surroundings, and through their activities changed the cultural scene beyond recognition. (Hodin 1974, 5)

The presence of such ‘top brains’ undoubtedly encouraged further émigrés to north London and recent scholarship has widened the focus beyond Hampstead to embrace the Finchley Road – Finchleystrasse – as it was nicknamed by local bus conductors paying humorous homage to the influx of largely German-speaking refugees who, during the same period, settled along its length: from well-heeled St John’s Wood in the south (NW8), to Childs Hill and Golders Green (NW11) in the north, and West Hampstead, Swiss Cottage and Belsize Park (NW6) along its eastern and western flanks. With a few exceptions, such as Oskar Kokoschka, the names of its inhabitants are generally far less well-known than those who settled in Hampstead ‘proper’, but their cumulative cultural contribution is now coming under greater scrutiny, most recently in the exhibition, Finchleystrasse: German artists in exile in Great Britain and beyond, 1933–45, held at the German Embassy, London (2018–2019).

Prior to this, in 2002 the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) curated the Continental Britons exhibition with an accompanying map of Finchleystrasse (fig. 1) illustrating the significant Jewish refugee presence across a complex network of professions, institutions and activities.

Drawing on published and unpublished sources, including the map of Finchleystrasse as a primary resource, this chapter examines the multi-faceted role played by this locale as a place of sanctuary for predominantly Jewish refugees, fleeing religious, ethnic or cultural persecution in Nazi-occupied Europe, who settled there between 1933–1945. With a particular focus on émigré contributors to the visual arts, it examines the rise of a range of social, cultural, religious and educational spaces and organisations initiated by the refugees’ presence to cater for both their everyday and wider cultural needs, asking how far they were successful in providing for such a diverse and multilingual émigré community, and what led, in many cases, to their eventual demise or relocation. It also references throughout the many informal refugee networks through which the émigrés assisted one
another, thereby establishing indirectly a little corner of Mitteleuropa in north west London.

Fig. 1: Map of Finchleystrasse, based on content from AJR Information 1946–1970. Created for the Continental Britons exhibition, Jewish Museum, London, 2002 (Courtesy AJR. Photograph by Justin Piperger).

Refugee background

The refugee demographic was complex, primarily comprising Austrians, Germans, Hungarians, Poles and Czechoslovaks, who arrived following moments of major political crisis in their respective homelands from 1933 onwards, often via more than one country of transit. Entry was by visa and many women were admitted on domestic visas (or obtained employment as domestics) – often the only way to enter Britain legitimately. These included painter Else Meidner (wife of Expressionist Ludwig Meidner) and graphic designer Dörte (‘Dodo’) Bürgner, both from privileged German-Jewish backgrounds and used to having their own servants, and Annely Juda (née Anneliese Brauer), also German-Jewish, later founder of the eponymous gallery in central London. She arrived in 1937 with only £1 in her pocket and found work in a house for German-Jewish refugees in Hampstead, where she met her future husband Paul. Another German artist, Communist Margarete Klopfleisch, who fled to London from Prague in 1938, worked as a home help for Roland Penrose in Hampstead and studied sculpture at Reading University with his support.7
The majority of refugees were Jewish. This diverse group encompassed orthodox, liberal and non-observant Jews, although the last two groups were significantly larger. As Geoffrey Alderman has observed, these largely assimilated and highly-educated Westjuden distanced themselves from both established Anglo-Jewry and the traditional, more isolated Ostjuden who, fleeing pogroms and economic deprivation in the Russian Pale of Settlement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had settled in London's East End 'ghetto' (Alderman 1998, 117). The new arrivals, instead, chose north west London, where they: “maintained their own distinct and discrete communal identity, […] created their own institutions (such as the AJR, Belsize Square Synagogue, and the Wiener Library), and established themselves as an independent, readily recognizable community” (Grenville 2018, 16). All struggled to retain their respective national, religious, ethnic and cultural identities while striving to fit unobtrusively into British daily life, and faced innumerable daily problems, including loss of language, culture and financial hardship, often associated with their 'forced journeys'. A guidance pamphlet for Jewish refugees issued by the German Jewish Aid Committee strongly advised that they “Refrain from speaking German in the streets and in public conveyances and in public places such as restaurants” (German Jewish Aid Committee 1939, 12). Following the outbreak of war in Britain in September 1939, the introduction of rationing in January 1940 and internment for so-called ‘enemy aliens’ in June 1940, these problems were further exacerbated.

**Spaces of refuge, Refugee and Aid Organisations**

Accommodation was the first priority for the newly arrived whose circumstances (unlike those for domestics) did not provide live-in arrangements. Within the broad demographic of Finchleystrasse, housing stock ranged from imposing period homes to dingy rooms with communal cooking facilities in corridors. (One refugee recalled that it was considered a step up to have a room with one's own stove (“Ode to Finchleystrasse” 2014).) A number were housed in hotels, such as the Hotel Shem-Tov in Fordwych Road, Kilburn, to the west of Finchley Road, run by the émigré parents of controversial artist Robert Lenkiewicz (1941–2002), whose numerous elderly Jewish residents included survivors from the camps.

Although predominantly middle-class, few of the so-called 'Hitler émigrés' were able to live in the style to which they had been accustomed prior to emigration (the Freud family in Hampstead's Maresfield Gardens and German-Jewish lawyer and self-taught artist, Fred Uhlman, who married into the aristocratic Croft family, and lived nearby in elegant Downshire Hill, were notable exceptions). Most were
impoverished, at least upon arrival and, during the war, typically lived in single-
room dwellings or small flats within divided houses, often behind architecturally
imposing facades of once grand homes.

One such was Berlin-born painter, Eva Frankfurther, who fled to England with
her siblings as a nine-year-old child in April 1939 (followed by her parents on one
of the last flights before the onset of war). In Blitz-torn London, they endured
the penetrating cold of an English winter before, in December 1941, renting a flat
in a large house in Belsize Park Gardens, owned by the Freud family, which also
housed other mainly German-Jewish refugees. Lucie Freud (mother of Berlin-
born painter, Lucian), a school friend of Eva’s mother, and her architect husband,
Ernst, were very helpful to the Frankfurthers after their arrival, one example of
the many informal networks where émigrés helped one another.

Although the majority of refugee aid agencies were clustered around Bloomsbury
in central London, one of the most significant, the self-help organisation
Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), was founded in Finchleystrasse at Fairfax
Mansions in summer 1941. Aiming to appeal widely, it embraced the widest
possible Jewish membership, encompassing Orthodoxy, Liberalism, Zionism
and secularism. Furthermore, the breadth and depth of the AJR’s activities
went far beyond the local community; from its clothing depot in Broadhurst
Gardens, behind Finchley Road underground station, it distributed thousands of
garments to needy Jews overseas. It also gathered other agencies, including the
AJR Employment Agency, United Restitution Office and Council of Jews from
Germany under its many-spoked umbrella. As a campaigning organisation, it
fought to have restrictions on so-called ‘enemy aliens’ lifted and, as the war ended,
to protest against forced repatriation, latterly taking an active role in supporting
restitution claims. Championing the naturalisation of many refugees in the late
1940s, it then supported them in their new homeland by “laying the foundation
for a flourishing community that combined its German-Jewish social culture with
a strong sense of integration into British society” (AJR website). From 1946 it also
published a monthly journal, AJR Information (renamed AJR Journal in 2000), an
initiative that continues today in the AJR’s role as a national charity supporting
Holocaust refugees and survivors living in Great Britain.

Cultural spaces

The AJR was also actively engaged in the cultural life of the community. German-
Jewish émigré Werner Rosenstock who became the AJR’s first General Secretary
(1941–1982) also edited AJR Information (1946–1982), which regularly published
pieces by *Finchleystrasse* residents, as well as reviewing literature and exhibitions by members, and promoting local businesses and services (Grenville 2018, 13). The AJR’s Jewish membership and apolitical stance, however, differentiated it from other, more secular refugee organisations, such as the Hampstead-founded *Freier Deutscher Kulturbund* (Free German League of Culture (FGLC) and the Austrian Centre (AC); both conceived along primarily political and national lines with many members hoping to return home after the war, they provided national solidarity while supporting members’ creative endeavours. Although the AC was based in Paddington, its offshoots extended to *Finchleystrasse*: the Austrian-theatre-in-exile, *Das Laterndl* (69 Eton Avenue, NW3) which, according to Daniel Snowman, “attempted to feed the flickering flames of culture among the refugee community while providing a social centre and regular home-away-from-home entertainment” and its “hard[er]-edged” breakaway cabaret club, the Blue Danube (153 Finchley Road) (Snowman 2003, 135).

“Ambitious, radical and star-studded”, the FGLC was founded in December 1938 by German-Jewish writer in exile Stefan Zweig, among others, at 47 Downshire Hill, Hampstead, the home of Fred Uhlman, and his wife, Diana (ibid., 135). Elias Canetti in his memoir *Party in the Blitz* downplayed Uhlman’s role, recalling: “Summer parties in his garden were popular affairs, the Hampstead intellectuals liked to meet there, and the occasional émigré” (Canetti 2005, 148). Established, however, as a cultural and social centre for German-speaking exiles, the FGLC was in fact one of the largest exile organisations in the UK until its dissolution in 1946 (Müller-Härlin 2004, 241).

Initially headed by theatre critic and essayist Alfred Kerr (father of future author-illustrator Judith Kerr) as President, succeeded in 1941 by Kokoschka, it offered space to artists (Margarete Klopfleisch was a founder member), musicians, actors, writers and scientists. Its Fine Arts section was co-chaired by Uhlman and German émigré sculptor, Paul Hamann, until both were interned as enemy aliens in June 1940, and replaced in 1941 by ex-Canadian internee, sculptor Heinz Worner. Artist members also included Austrian sculptor Georg Ehrlich and painter Ernst Neuschul. Many members also featured in the New Burlington Galleries’ 1938 *Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art*, intended as a riposte to the infamous Nazi “Degenerate Art” show the previous year. Other activities included the *Children’s Art from All Countries* exhibition, opened by Kokoschka on 16 August 1941 at the local Clubhouse in Upper Park Road, Belsize Park (Malet 2008, 55).

The Artists’ Refugee Committee (ARC) also played a critical role. Founded in November 1938 to assist with rescuing members of the Prague-based *Oskar-Kokoschka-Bund*, it was also based at the Uhlmans’ home (with Diana acting as *de facto* secretary, although Stephen Bone’s name appeared in this capacity on its
letterhead), initiated by their neighbour, modern art collector Margaret Gardiner and Roland Penrose. Its founders were primarily British artists including Sir Muirhead Bone, his son Stephen, Betty Rea and Richard Carline, who had lived in the house with his artist family before the Uhlmans (Müller-Härlin 2010, 54–56). As Monica Bohm-Duchen has noted, “Gardiner, Penrose and the Uhlmans were at the very heart of a network of individuals intent on lending practical and moral support to refugee artists” (Bohm-Duchen 2019, 160).

Many exiles, including Communist John Heartfield, famed for his anti-Nazi photomontage propaganda, and the art historian Francis Klingender, appeared on the Uhlmans’ doorstep seeking refuge. Diana recalled the arrival of some “twenty-one or twenty-two people […] from Prague” and, in particular:

> One artist, Fritz Feigl, knocking at the door and saying “Is this the address of Mr. Carline, the Artists’ Refugee Committee and the Kulturbund?” He had a little notebook from which he was reading the names of these three important introductions he had been given by various different people! (Uhlman 1974, 31)

### Café culture

Beyond these formal organisations, Finchleystrasse provided much informal cultural enrichment, particularly through social clubs and newly established continental cafés and restaurants, where émigrés gathered for cheap, nourishing meals and to recreate the atmosphere of their former European haunts. Although some Germans scorned Viennese Kaffeehaus culture as time-wasting, the majority were bound together by their shared enjoyment of familiar cuisine and language; they could spend the whole day in these havens “reading […] over a single cup of coffee or consuming Schnitzel and Strudel with fellow refugees” (Snowman 2003, 227). As Anna Nyburg suggests, they could “eat familiar food at last and drink coffee made in the central European way” and “also speak German there with old and new friends”. As Hodin observed, since “most of the modern principles in art and literature” had been “worked out over a sociable glass of wine or cup of coffee – in Paris, in Vienna, in Prague”, it was necessary to establish their equivalent in London (Hodin 1945, unpaginated).

Café society centred, in particular, on the Dorice and Cosmo restaurants, both on Finchley Road, where German language, cuisine and continental dress were the norm. The Dorice at 169a Finchley Road, which regularly advertised its “continental cuisine” in the AJR Information, was named after its founder and
proprietor, German refugee Doris Balacs. She had arrived in England two weeks prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, speaking hardly any English and with only half-a-crown to her name. In her first job as a domestic she received so little food that her feet swelled from malnutrition and she quickly found alternative employment as a ‘nippy’ (waitress) at Lyons’ Corner House, before setting up her own restaurant.

At the Dorice “rootless refugees gathered to soak up the atmosphere of the country that betrayed them”. According to writer Ian Buruma:

For several decades the Dorice was the meeting place for former refugees. Furriers from Leipzig, bankers from Dresden, journalists from Prague and jewellers from Hamburg had their regular table – the German Stammtisch – where they discussed business and the kids over schnitzels and beer. (Buruma n.d)

Years later, locals still recall the distinctive “smell of roasting coffee beans [that] started outside the Dorice […] (Gullasch, Nockerl, Wiener Gugelhupf) and drifted across the entrance of the old swimming pool/gym and down into Finchley Road tube station” (Norman 2019).

Both the Dorice and Cosmo also provided an informal network for continental refugees at all levels, from the caterers to the clientele: the cakes – “the best in London,” according to the proprietor – were “baked by a man who started life as a commercial artist in Upper Silesia. He learnt to be a pastry chef at an international camp for ‘enemy aliens’ in 1940” and had been “making cakes ever since” (Buruma n.d).

There was clearly some rivalry between the two restaurants, as noted by English author Fay Weldon who briefly waitressed at the Dorice (her mother had once been a cook at Cosmo). Both, she noted, “were the haunt of refugees and intellectuals”, but Cosmo (fig. 2), located close to Swiss Cottage at 4–6 Northways Parade on the Finchley Road, which originally opened as a coffee bar in 1937, later extending to include a 70-cover restaurant, was “the classier” (Weldon 2002, 237). It counted Nobel Prize-winner Elias Canetti, and “his disciples” – the young Iris Murdoch and Bernice Rubens – among its regulars, along with Sigmund Freud and German émigré vocal coach and psychotherapist Alfred Wolfsohn (Weldon 2002, 237). Weldon regarded herself as “on the wrong side of the road” and struggled with the challenges of a “Berlin-style restaurant where no one but me spoke English, the orders were for dishes I did not understand, Königsberg Klops [sic] and such like and I couldn’t tell a dessert from an entrée” (Weldon 2002, 237).
Marion Manheimer, whose parents took over Cosmo from its former Hungarian owners in 1957, described it as a symbolic “sanctuary”: “My father left Berlin to escape the Nazis but lost many members of his family”, recalling that “he would hire people he met on his travels and the place became full of people who had come to north London to escape fascism. It was also a great place for conversation” (Manheimer 2013). Journalist Susie Boyt, daughter of Lucian Freud, remembered it as “principally filled with men and women from Berlin and Vienna” for whom it provided “a social sanctuary” alongside the so-called “Hampstead anxious” (Boyt 2013).

The two cafés lingered on into the next generation. Surgeon Ellis Douek, a Cairo-born Jewish refugee (and brother of cookery writer Claudia Roden), whose family was uprooted by the Suez Crisis, recalled how his Viennese friends (distantly related to Mahler) frequented both cafés post-war, but favoured the Dorice for tea, owing to the presence of a piano-player. Philosopher J. J. Valberg lamented the passing of both establishments in his memoirs (Valberg 2007, xv.).

**Places of Religious Worship, Small Businesses and Informal Networks**

The complex makeup of the Jewish émigré community led to a need for a range of places of worship. Several synagogues with congregations of different religious affiliations sprung up around Finchleystrasse, with Belsize Square Synagogue as one of the most prominent.
Founded in 1939 by mainly German refugees and based on the continental liberal (or liberale) movement, it was designed by German-Jewish émigré architect Heinz Reifenberg, husband of Gabriele Tergit (pen name of Dr. Elise Reifenberg), a pioneering female court reporter in Berlin, who had achieved overnight fame for her novel critiquing the Weimar Republic, *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931). The couple fled Germany in 1933, arriving in London in 1938 (via Czechoslovakia and Palestine), where Tergit became secretary of the London PEN-Centre of German-language Authors Abroad and a frequent contributor to *AJR Information*. Her portrait (fig. 3) was painted by her sister-in-law Adèle Reifenberg, who had studied in Berlin and Weimar under Lovis Corinth, where she met her future husband, artist Julius Rosenbaum. Tergit’s old-fashioned dress and hairstyle imply that the portrait was probably painted pre-migration; a faint fold down the centre further suggests that it was rolled up and probably brought to England in a suitcase, perhaps as a memento. When the Rosenbaums also fled Germany in 1939 the two sisters-in-law could not have been certain they would meet again; however, all four were subsequently reunited in north west London.

Fig. 3: Adèle Reifenberg, *Portrait of the Artist’s Sister-in-Law, Elise Reifenberg (Gabriele Tergit)*, not dated, Ben Uri Collection, London (© The estate of Adèle Reifenberg).
As the AJR magazine and *Finchleystrasse* map record, continental small businesses formed the backbone of the neighbourhood, often providing employment for fellow émigrés. These included German tailors, brassiere and corset makers, such as Mrs E. Sonnenfeld; estate agents Ellis and Co, who employed German émigré Mr H. Reichenbach; A. Breuer, who sold typewriters in Fairfax Road; and Ackerman's Chocolates, established by German refugee Werner Ackermann, who opened branches in both Kensington and at 9 Goldhurst Terrace, Hampstead. Graphic artist and fashion illustrator Dodo Bürgner, who arrived in London in 1936, found piecemeal work for commercial clients including Ackerman's, for whom she created packaging and advertising material decorated with the brand’s distinctive ‘boy’ logo (fig. 4) (Krümmer 2012, 160ff).

![Fig. 4: Dodo Bürgner, Design for Akerman’s [sic], 1940, private collection (© Dodo Estate, photograph courtesy of Clare Amsel).](image)

Among the many informal and intersecting émigré networks, no doubt the presence of Sigmund Freud encouraged the growth of *Finchleystrasse’s* artistic and psychoanalytical circles. Local émigré psychotherapists and psychologists included Lola Paulsen, Heinz Westman, Anna Freud and husband and wife,
Philip and Eva Metman. Metman counselled Dodo after her second marriage to the noted Jungian psychoanalyst Gerhard Adler (with whom she emigrated and who established a practice in NW1)\(^1\) ended, like her first marriage, in divorce. Emigrée textile designer Elisabeth Tomalin was also a frequent guest of the Metmans: their photographs fill her albums and they also hosted her marriage reception. After she separated from her husband, English left-wing writer Miles Tomalin,\(^1\) he and Elisabeth each moved into a flat within the same small block in Regents Park Road (NW1), designed by Goldfinger (her former employer), where she also set up her drawing table and worked from home.

**Artists’ (home) studios, Art Education Spaces and Exhibiting opportunities**

Home studios were very common, with struggling artists in tiny flats often only streets apart from their wealthy patrons. The freezing conditions in Ludwig and Else Meidner’s attic flat in Golders Green were recorded by Ann Sidgwick, whose portrait had been commissioned from Meidner by Michael Croft (Uhlman’s brother-in-law); during her sittings in the harsh winter of 1939 she kept her coat on throughout (Baer 2006, 283).

The Meidners then moved to West Heath Drive, and finally to a tiny flat at 677 Finchley Road (1947–1953), where Hodin (previously unaware of the Meidners’ close proximity to his own home) visited Ludwig at the artist’s invitation in May 1953 (meeting Else on his second visit). Subsequently, Hodin visited Meidner “repeatedly” in his home-cum-studio (“more the cell of a monk than the studio of a painter” with “2000 works accumulated in the dark room”, representing “fourteen years of creative artistic work in a country which had no appreciation for his art, of the hard life of an exile driven from his native land for racial reasons”\(^1\)). Hodin took numerous informal photographs of the couple (Tate Archive, London), some published after Ludwig’s death in a series in the *Darmstädter Tagblatt* (winter 1966–1967) as a tribute and to commemorate the triumphant rebuilding of his career in Germany. These images additionally record the complex, intimate and enduring relationship between Hodin and both Meidners, culminating in Hodin’s publications in German (on Ludwig in 1973; Else in 1989) and typifying his controversial art historical methodology.

Many émigrés established studios locally, their lives and work often intersecting like the overlapping circles of a complex venn diagram. Among them were painters Martin Bloch, Erich Kahn, Walter Nessler, Lottie Reizenstein, Arthur Segal and Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, draughtswoman Milein Cosman, and sculptors
Jussuf Abbo, Georg Ehrlich, Karel Vogel and Anna Mahler. Mahler (daughter of the composer) lived close to Kokoschka (her mother’s former lover) and later sculpted young Austrian émigrée, Helga Michie (twin sister of noted writer, Ilse Aichinger), who initially stayed with the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross on Fitzjohn’s Avenue (NW3), overlooking the Freuds’ back garden. Her later refugee circle included Canetti (Motesiczky’s lover), whom she met at the small Finchley Road flat of exiled German writer Robert Neumann and his wife (Ivanovic 2018, 116).

The wider Finchleystrasse artistic community included: German art historian, Ernst Gombrich, in Briardale Gardens; Viennese art publisher, Walter Neurath, in Chesterford Gardens (sketched by Kokoschka); Viennese art dealer, Harry Fischer (who exhibited Kokoschka), in Lower Terrace; and Nikolaus Pevsner, author of The Buildings of England, in Wildwood Terrace. In addition, the Swiss Cottage area (NW6) has also been identified as a focal point “for Jews engaged in photography generally” (Berkowitz 2015, 67). Inge Ader (née Nord) opened her first studio locally in spring 1942 with Anneli Bunyard, who photographed Das Laterndl, as well as illustrations for children’s books. Jewish wedding photographer Freddy Weitzman, who had trained under Polish-born Boris Bennett (né Boris Sochaczewska), also had a studio nearby and an upper-class English clientele.

Despite being Austria’s foremost Expressionist, Finchleystrasse’s most notable artist resident, Oskar Kokoschka, was little known in England upon his arrival. Outspoken in his anti-Nazi views, his work had been increasingly suppressed or confiscated from German public collections, culminating in 1937 in his inclusion in the notorious Entartete Kunst (degenerate art) touring exhibition, and provoking his ironically titled Portrait of a ‘Degenerate Artist’ (1938); the following year, he was dismissed from the Prussian Academy. Kokoschka fled to Czechoslovakia in 1934, where he met and married Olda Palkowska, and the couple arrived in England in October 1938, living initially in Boundary Road (NW8). This also housed the bookshop run by émigré brothers, Willy and Josef Suschitzky – cousins of the sibling photographers Wolf Suschitzky and Edith Tudor-Hart – and is the present site, at 108A, of Ben Uri Gallery and Museum. Later Kokoschka moved to Eyres Court, Finchley Road (now marked by a commemorative blue plaque).

During the war Kokoschka was an important political figurehead, able – as a Czech citizen – to campaign against internment. As FGLC President, he attempted to recruit other prominent German-Jewish exiles, including physicist Albert Einstein (then resident in Princeton, New Jersey, USA), who turned down Kokoschka’s “kind and honourable request. Because from a political point of view I consider it presently as erroneous to undertake anything that is suited to raise Germany’s repute”. Einstein felt it “imperative also from the point of view of
Czechoslovak émigré Fred (Fritz) Feigl lived at various Finchleystrasse addresses while preparing for an important exhibition of émigré art at the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery (1941), which afterwards purchased four of his local watercolour landscapes including Downshire Church, Keats’ Grove, Hampstead, and Hampstead Heath Pond (Sawicki 2016, 241), before settling finally in a flat at 24 Belsize Park Gardens. The émigré sculptor Elisabeth (‘Emmy’) Wolff-Fuerth, who sculpted Feigl’s portrait, was a close neighbour in the same street.

The sculptor Fred (Fritz) Kormis and his wife, Rachel, who arrived in England via Holland from Germany in 1934, lived initially at 41 Broadhurst Gardens (1935–1937), then at 9 Sherriff Road Studios (1938–1940). In 1938 Kormis participated in the Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art, but following the loss by bombing of all of his large-scale work in September 1940 moved briefly to Hampstead Garden Suburb until rescued by a commission from the American-Jewish collector Samuel Friedenberg to make a series of medallions of prominent Jewish personalities in Britain. The Kormises settled finally in a tiny studio flat at 3b Greville Place, St. John’s Wood, one of several in the former home of artist Sir Frank Dicksee and prima ballerina Madame Lydia Kyasht. Kormis, a frequent customer at the Dorice, remained here until his death some 44 years later. A photograph towards the end of his life shows the cramped space full of his sculptures (fig. 5). His major memorial sculpture group ‘to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945’ (1967–1969) is sited nearby at Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill (NW2). Greville Place also housed: at (3i) fellow Nazi refugee, South African painter, printmaker and teacher Dolf

Fig. 5: Photograph of Fred Kormis, courtesy of Lee and Graham Archive (© Rosemary Lee).
Rieser; at (3a) New Zealand émigré artist and glass engraver, John Hutton; and at (4a), in the former studio of Victorian sculptor Gilbert Bayes, Polish émigré Marek Zulawski, creator of the iconic propaganda poster ‘Poland First to Fight’. From the mid-50s Kormis’ close friend, Austrian émigré sculptor Willi Soukop was a near neighbour at 26 Greville Road; and Joy Fleischmann, widow of émigré sculptor Arthur Fleischmann, lived nearby.

Finchleystrasse also housed two émigré art schools: German-Jewish painters Julius Rosenbaum (who had repaired Blitz-damaged houses and worked as a china restorer during the war) and his wife, Adèle Reifenberg, established a small but flourishing private painting school (1948–1956), exhibiting with their pupils as the Belsize Group. Paul Hamann (whose works include a cast of Lee Miller’s torso) and his German-Jewish artist wife, Hilde, offered life classes in their St John’s Wood studio, the latter functioning as an informal network for many former internees including Erich Kahn and Hugo Dachinger. Nevertheless, there was little formalised support for visual culture until the Hampstead Arts Centre (renamed Camden Arts Centre in 1967) opened on the corner of Arkwright Road and Finchley Road in 1965, providing art and design classes. Following its first exhibition in 1966, it hosted, 20 years later, the first comprehensive exhibition of émigré artists in Britain: Kunst im Exil in Großbritannien 1933–1945, selected from a larger show at Schloss Charlottenburg in Berlin.

Finchleystrasse’s artists also significantly enriched the exhibitions, cultural activities and collection of the Ben Uri Gallery from 1934 onwards. Founded in 1915 in the East End by Jewish émigré artisans, then closed temporarily in 1939, it had reopened in 1944 in Portman Street in central London. Yet entry forms for its annual open shows in the late 1940s reveal a roster of Finchleystrasse postcodes for exhibitors including the Czechoslovak brothers Jacob and Alexander Bauernfreund (Bornfriend) in Greencroft Gardens, and the Reifenberg-Rosenbaums at 53 Primrose Gardens (NW3). Today Ben Uri Gallery, which moved to Boundary Road in St John’s Wood in 2001, close to the southern end of Finchleystrasse, displays work from its museum collection alongside a mixed exhibition programme, and its newly-launched Research Unit for the study of the Jewish and immigrant contribution to British visual culture since 1900.

**Finchleystrasse as subject matter**

Finchleystrasse and its environs also inspired many artworks: Hodin preserved many of Feigl’s lighthearted Finchleystrasse sketchbook vignettes and hand-painted Christmas cards (c. 1957–1965) – the early signature “Frederich and Margaret”
giving way to the shorter, Anglicised “Fred and Marg” – and many of Feigl’s lively local London park scenes of Regent’s Park, Golder’s Hill and Kenwood.

The Heath’s leafy vistas appeared frequently as both subject and backdrop in works by a number of émigrés including Henry Sanders, Willi Rondas and Klaus Meyer, whose Girl in Red (1990, Ben Uri Collection, fig. 6) depicts his young daughter in their South Hill Park garden, backing onto the Heath. A contrasting cityscape by Austrian émigrée Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, Finchley Road at Night (1952), portrays a “simplified and harmonious view of the busy, modern urban life” (Schlenker 2011, 219) of north London to which she returned in 1948, after spending the war years in Amersham, taking on a flat-share at 14 Compayne Gardens, West Hampstead (where Canetti had a room, c. 1951–1957), later moving to Hampstead in 1960. As her cataloguer, Ines Schlenker, has commented, this part of north London became “a constant presence in her Wahlheimat (adopted country)” (Schlenker 2011, 220).

Fig. 6: Klaus Meyer, Girl in Red, 1990, Ben Uri Collection, London (© Klaus Meyer Estate).
Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that while Finchleystrasse played a vital role as a place of sanctuary for the refugees and as a locale for the social, cultural, religious and educational spaces and organisations they initiated during and immediately after the Second World War, beyond this period its support gradually diminished and the majority of the organisations either disbanded or relocated. In 2003 the AJR relocated northwards and, as the refugees themselves became more integrated or moved further out, Finchleystrasse gradually lost its position as a cultural 'spine'. Furthermore, although their influence had been strong, their presence had not always been welcome, as evidenced by an unsuccessful petition, signed by more than 2000 Hampstead locals in 1945, agitating for the émigrés’ removal and repatriation.  

80 years later, the wide, tree-lined expanse of Finchley Road itself is now a noisy, traffic-choked dual carriageway with a central barrier making pedestrian crossing difficult, and the driver-only buses that travel up and down its length no longer have conductors to engage in playful banter with their passengers. Cosmo closed in the late 1990s (its unique role marked in 2013 by the AJR’s commemorative blue plaque) and even the London Jewish Cultural Centre (LJCC), one of the local community’s subsequent cultural hubs, housed in Anna Pavlova’s former home, Ivy House, in North End Road (NW11), closed in 2015. If the AJR map was redrawn today, it would be evident that many of the émigré small businesses and institutions which flourished from the 1930s onwards are long gone.

Nevertheless, they provided significant material and intangible sustenance to a refugee generation, and among their legacies is the recently opened Jewish cultural centre, JW3, whose name plays on and highlights the local NW3 postcode, tying the current generation of north London Jews firmly to this locale.

Notes

2. In 1942 it hosted the Aid to Russia fundraising exhibition for the National Council of Labour. Willow Road was also home to émigré couple, musicologist Hans Keller and artist Milein Cosman.
3. Originally Finchley New Road, it opened as a turnpike in 1835, with grand homes around Fortune Green, Childs Hill and Golders Green. It is now a 7 km main road following the A41.
Curated by Ben Uri Gallery and Museum at the German Embassy London (February 2018 – January 2019).

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Klopfleisch exhibited in the FDKB and AIA sculpture exhibition in October 1942 and *Artists Aid Jewry* in February 1943.

Uhlman’s wife Diana was the daughter of Henry Page Croft, 1st Baron Croft, Under-Secretary of State for War (1940–1945).

Other inhabitants included a Norwegian sea captain. Eva’s father, Paul Frankfurter, lived here for the rest of his life.

Woburn House, home to the German-Jewish Aid Committee (1933–1938) was succeeded by Bloomsbury House, with subsidiary organisations including the Free Meal Service, Society for Protection of Science and Learning, Academic Assistance Council (Bihler 2018, 118–120).

It moved in June 1943 to 279a Finchley Road.

It relocated to Upper Park Road in 1939, although the Artists’ Section continued to meet in Downshire Hill until 1943.

Among the 60-strong exhibitors were painters Max Beckmann, Oskar Kokoschka and Max Ernst, sculptors Ernst Barlach, Georg Ehrlich, Fritz Kormis and Dadaist Kurt Schwitters. Despite huge visitor attendance, it received a divided critical response (see *London 1938*).


Cosmo features in the cabaret *The Ballad of Cosmo Cafe*, Composer Carl Davis, Librettist Philip Glassborow, Director Pamela Howard, part of the nationwide year-long *Insiders/Outsiders* Festival celebrating the contribution to British culture by refugees from Nazi persecution, from March 2019. Wolfsohn fled Germany in 1939 and established a practice in Golders Green.

The London Gazette (17 October 1947, p. 4884) notes Gerhard Adler’s naturalisation on 12 September 1947 at 9 Woodstock Avenue, NW11.

Miles Tomalin, diary entry from July 1940 (Private Collection, London).

J.P. Hodin, Typescript, “Portrait of the Artist Ludwig Meidner” (Tate Archives, London, c. 1953), TGA 20062, uncatatalogued.

Albert Einstein to Herrn Oskar Kokoschka, 9 March 1939. Translated from the German original by Michael Ursinus, Fred Uhlman papers (Private Archive, London), by kind permission of Caroline Compton.

*Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 12 October 1945, p. 1.

Its role was partially replaced by the privately-funded JW3 Jewish community centre, which opened at 341–351 Finchley Road in 2013. Camden Art Centre exhibits contemporary art.
References


German Jewish Aid Committee, in conjunction with the Jewish Board of Deputies. While You are in England. Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee. 1939.


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