

# Celebrating fifty years of the Thank-Offering to Britain Fund

ANTHONY GRENVILLE

On 10 November 2015, the British Academy, in partnership with the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), hosted an event to mark the 50th Anniversary of the 'Thank-Offering to Britain' Fund: 'Commemoration and Celebration: The British Academy and the Jewish Refugee Academics in Britain after 1933'.



The following is an edited version of the lecture given on that occasion by Dr Tony Grenville, Consultant Editor of the *AJR Journal* (pictured above).

The relationship between the British Academy and the Jewish academic refugees from Hitler, which reached a high point with the Thank-Offering to Britain Fellowship, did not emerge from a vacuum in the 1960s. A significant relationship had already developed between the refugee academics and British institutions like the Academy in the 1930s. I would argue that this helped to create the framework within which the relationship between the Jewish refugees in Britain, represented by the Association of Jewish Refugees, and the Academy, culminating in the creation of the Fellowship in November 1965, were to develop.

Refugee academics from the Third Reich seeking positions in Britain were fortunate in that an organisation had been established early on to assist those of them who had been deprived of their posts at German

universities or of their prospects of being appointed to such posts. This was the Academic Assistance Council, founded in 1933 on the initiative of William Beveridge and the Hungarian-born scientist Leo Szilard, which reconstituted itself in 1936 as the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) and helped many hundreds of refugee scholars to find employment in British or American academic institutions. Today, its successor organisation is known as CARA, the Council for At-Risk Academics. Though the SPSL was based in London, it proved impossible to place anything like all the refugee scholars in British posts; many went on to the USA. Nevertheless, the SPSL was almost unique as an organisation dedicated to placing refugee academics in new posts. Its long-serving secretary, Esther 'Tess' Simpson, was regarded for decades, until her death in 1996, with the greatest affection by the many hundreds of academics who had benefited from her tireless efforts on their behalf. The SPSL had an office at Burlington House, seat of the Royal Society, but Esther Simpson was also a well-known figure at the British Academy. The institutional network connecting the SPSL and the British Academy emerges, for example, in that William Beveridge, founder of the SPSL, was a Fellow of the Academy.

## Proposal

Against that background, I now turn to the establishment of what was originally called the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund. This evolved from a proposal in 1963 that the Jewish refugees from central Europe should make a public gesture of thanks to Britain, their adopted homeland, to be paid for by their donations. The idea originated with Victor Ross, a former refugee who was a senior executive with *Reader's Digest*. The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) joined forces with Ross and took on the administration of the fund-raising; Ross became co-chairman of the Fund's organising committee, alongside Werner M. Behr, AJR vice-chairman. The first mention of what was to become the Fund occurs in a report in *AJR Information*, the AJR's monthly journal, on a meeting



Recordings of the presentations may be found via [www.britishacademy.ac.uk/commemoration-refugees](http://www.britishacademy.ac.uk/commemoration-refugees)

of the Board of the AJR held on 27 January 1963: 'it was suggested that an appropriate scheme should be launched by which the former refugees should express their gratitude to the British nation for having admitted them to this country twenty-five years ago.'

This was amplified by a statement that autumn, recalling the pogroms of November 1938:

In November, twenty-five years will have elapsed since the mass exodus of the Jews from Central Europe started. During the few months between the pogroms and the outbreak of war, this small island, then in an economic crisis, rescued more Jewish persecutees than any other single country. The Executive [of the AJR] is considering ways of visibly expressing the gratitude of the former refugees to the British people, and it is hoped that details of an appropriate scheme will be announced shortly.

Three months later, a boxed announcement appeared in the journal, headed 'Former Refugees' Thanks to Britain: Collective Gesture of Gratitude Planned'. Readers were informed that Victor Ross had published a letter in several national papers proposing such a gesture of collective gratitude and that the response to this letter had been most encouraging. The AJR and Ross were therefore considering several proposed schemes, and, once one was chosen, intended to launch an appeal 'on the widest possible basis'.

The scheme adopted became known as the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund, the proceeds of which were to be used for the awarding of Research Fellowships and the holding of lectures, both under the auspices of the British Academy. Ross approached the Academy, as the minutes of the meeting of its Council on 27 May 1964 recorded:

A proposal had been received from Mr. Victor Ross, on behalf of refugees from Nazi oppression who had settled happily in Great Britain, that a Fund should be established to commemorate their welcome into Britain. The suggestion was that the Fund should be named 'The Thank-offering to Britain' Fund, and that this Fund should be used for the establishment of a Lecture and Research Fellowship under the auspices of the Academy.

The subject of both the lecture and the fellowship was to 'relate to "Human Studies", widely interpreted in their bearing upon the welfare of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom'. The 'Thank-Offering to Britain' Fund Lecture was to be given every two years, for a fee of not less than £100; in the event, the lectures were given annually from 1966 till 1974, and thereafter mostly biennially until 2004. The 'Thank-Offering to Britain' Fund Research Award was to enable a Fellow selected by the Council to work for a period not exceeding three years at a university approved by the Council. With the co-operation of the British Academy secured, the AJR proceeded to publicise the scheme to its members and to raise funds. In a front-page article in *AJR Information* of September 1964, entitled 'A Quarter of a Century: Days of Remembrances', the AJR's long-serving General Secretary, Werner Rosenstock, introduced the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund to his readers; it was he who was

principally responsible for the administration of the Fund. He explained that the proceeds of the Fund were to be used for the awarding of research fellowships and the holding of lectures under the auspices of the British Academy, 'as a perpetual memorial of our gratitude'.

The Fund's patrons could scarcely have been more eminent. They were the distinguished economist Lord Lionel Robbins, President of the British Academy and author of the Robbins Report of 1963 on higher education; Sir Isaiah Berlin, a member of the Academy's Council (later President) and one of the great intellectual figures of his day; Professor (later Sir) Ernest B. Chain and Sir Hans Krebs, the two refugees from Nazism in Britain who had won Nobel Prizes by 1964; and a third refugee, Professor (later Sir) Ludwig Guttmann, Director of the Stoke Mandeville Spinal Injuries Centre. The nineteen members of the Fund's committee included leading figures in the AJR and other refugee organisations. The organising committee of the Fund sent out to all AJR members a letter, signed by its two co-chairmen, inviting them to contribute to the Fund.

## Response

The reaction to the appeal was gratifying. Already in October 1964, *AJR Information* reported that the response had been very encouraging. The appeal evidently struck a chord in the refugee community, as a letter sent by a contributor who was now deputy head of a college in Jamaica showed

I read in the *Manchester Guardian* about the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund. I was one of those who after the Kristallnacht was sent to Oranienburg [concentration camp] but managed to come to Britain in time before the outbreak of war. I will never be able to repay all the kindness and understanding that was shown to me from simple Lancashire cotton workers to Quaker refugee workers and Jewish manufacturers. I am now a British subject and could not wish for anything better. I am trying to repay part of my debt by teaching as a British subject in Jamaica. What I can send is totally inadequate, but I try to say 'Thank you' every day by my work.

A letter attached to a contribution received from New Jersey, USA, read:

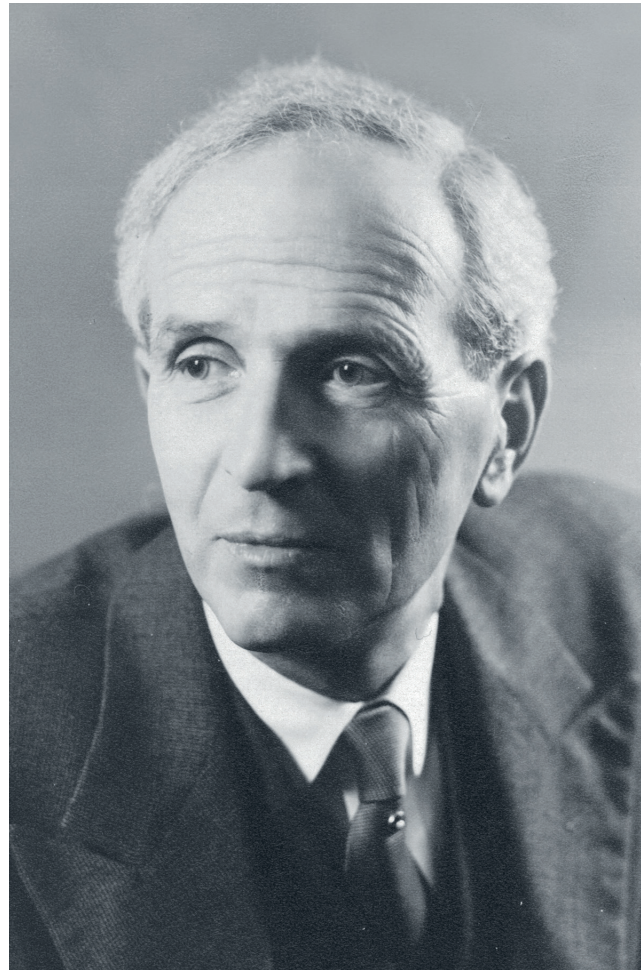
I was only eight years old when we came to Britain from Germany. The ways in which we were accepted in those difficult times can never be repaid financially, but the heartfelt gratitude that so many of us felt for many years needed a form of expression. I am delighted to be able to contribute to your fitting memorial.

The British Academy also became aware of the unusual enthusiasm with which refugees reacted to the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund. On 21 July 1964, Miss D.W. Pearson, Assistant Secretary at the Academy, wrote to Victor Ross, enclosing a specimen form for a deed of covenant, a tax-efficient way for contributors to increase the amount of their donations at no extra cost to themselves. Evidently,

the printers (Oxford University Press) moved too slowly to keep pace with the eagerness of potential donors: before they had returned the proof of the form to the Academy, a handwritten note to Doris Pearson from another member of staff informed her that Ross had phoned to ask for the forms as quickly as possible, to send to contributors impatient to use them. Isaiah Berlin sent his donation to Rosenstock, as Treasurer of the Fund, in October 1964, through N.M. Rothschild & Sons, but this attracted the attention of H.M. Inspector of Taxes, who demanded a copy of the rules of the Fund, as evidence of the charitable purposes for which it would be used.

In July 1966, Werner M. Behr wrote to Pearson, enclosing a cheque for \$50 from Fred Lang of Illinois, USA. A note of admiration for the response aroused by the Fund crept into Doris Pearson's customary businesslike style: 'The way in which new donors are still coming forward from time to time to add their contribution to the Fund is really rather impressive', she wrote in her reply to Behr. She would probably also have been impressed by a letter she received in August 1965 from the eminent Classical scholar Günther Zuntz (Figure 1),<sup>1</sup> Professor of Hellenistic Greek at the University of Manchester, saying somewhat sharply that he had learnt about the Fund only from Lord Robbins's presidential address<sup>2</sup> and asking to be put in touch with the Fund's Treasurer: 'For I want to do my modest bit.' Donations were also received in the form of bequests. It was a source of pride to the AJR that shortly before his death in London in 1965, the internationally known economist, political scientist and government adviser Moritz J. Bonn had stipulated in a codicil to his will that a substantial legacy should go to the Fund; Bonn had been one of the first German scholars to be appointed to a university position in Britain after 1933.

In an article in *AJR Information* of April 1965, Rosenstock responded at some length to critics of the Fund who argued that the refugees had already amply repaid any debt that they might owe Britain, through their contribution to the war effort and subsequently to British society generally, and that the Fund was excessive as an expression of gratitude; some felt that the refugees owed no debt to Britain at all, in the light of British policy before 1945 on immigration into both Palestine and the UK. The arguments presented on both sides here gave every appearance of emanating from entrenched positions based on strongly held views. On the one hand stood those who felt a sense of gratitude to Britain, who had settled by and large happily and integrated by and large smoothly into British society and who felt at ease with their part-British identity; and on the other hand stood those who felt that Britain had admitted them grudgingly and in insufficient numbers, that British society had hardly gone out of its way to make them feel welcome – most obviously in the mass internment of refugees as 'enemy aliens' in summer 1940 – and who preserved a sense of alienation and marginality in their daily life in Britain. Volume 3 of Isaiah Berlin's collected



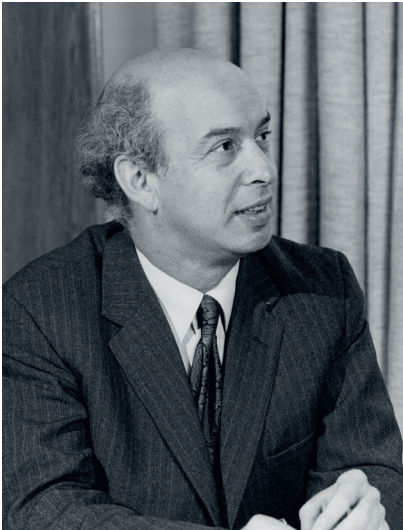
**Figure 1**  
The classical scholar Günther Zuntz FBA (1902-1992) left Germany for Denmark in 1934, before moving on to Britain in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of war.

letters contains two letters in reply to letters he had received from Ernest Rose (Rosenheim), a refugee critical of the Fund; Berlin was unusually blunt in his rebuttal of Rose's charges against Britain, denying that British pre-war immigration policy had been ungenerous, and comparing the internment of refugees in 1940 favourably with the record of other nations that had detained Jews.

Overall, however, one cannot help being impressed by the sheer number of refugees who contributed to the Fund, and the amount they gave, which in the end came to over £96,000, or about £1 million in today's money. That was a remarkable sum for a community of some 50,000 people who had mostly arrived as impoverished refugees in the later 1930s and had had barely twenty years of peacetime conditions to build up a degree of prosperity. The April 1965 issue of *AJR Information* carried as an appendix a list of donors to the Fund. This ran to five solid pages of names, with six columns per page, totalling some 3,000 contributors. It did not include those who wished to remain anonymous and those whose contributions came in later, who together would have increased the final total substantially; in early 1966 that reached 4,500. Famous names included Anna and Ernst Freud; scholars like Francis Carsten,

1. Günther Zuntz was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1956.

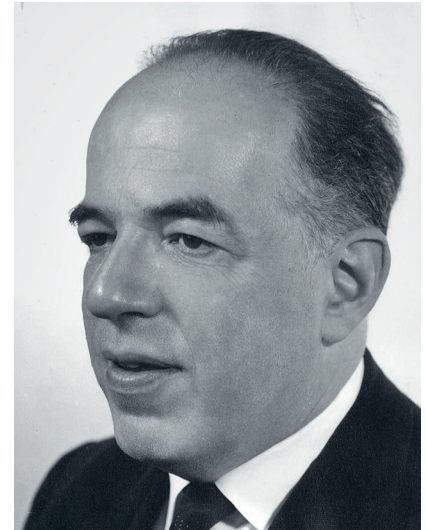
2. Lord Robbins, 'Presidential Address, 7 July 1965', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 51, 39-46 at p. 42.



**Figure 2**  
The social statistician Claus Moser FBA (1922-2015) moved to Britain from Germany in 1936. He delivered the 2004 Thank-Offering to Britain Fund Lecture, on 'The Future of Our Universities'.



**Figure 3**  
The law scholar Otto Kahn-Freund FBA (1900-1979) came to Britain from Germany in 1933. He gave a series of three Thank-Offering to Britain Fund Lectures in 1978, on the subject of 'Labour Relations'.



**Figure 4**  
The art historian Ernst Gombrich FBA (1909-2001) came to Britain from Vienna in the 1930s.

Eduard Fraenkel, Ernst Gombrich (Figure 4), Otto Kahn-Freund (Figure 3) and Claus Moser (Figure 2);<sup>3</sup> scientists like Hans Kornberg, Nicholas Kurti, Heinz London and Max Perutz; Mosco Carner, Peter Gellhorn, Franz Reizenstein and Peter Stadlen from the musical world; and the cartoonist Vicky (Victor Weisz), the industrialist

3. The historian Francis Carsten was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1971, the classicist Eduard Fraenkel in 1941, the art historian Ernst Gombrich in 1960, the lawyer Otto Kahn-Freund in 1965, and the social statistician Claus Moser in 1969.

Mac Goldsmith, the actor Martin Miller, and the rabbis Ignaz Maybaum and Jakob Kokotek. But most significant were the serried ranks of ordinary refugees who formed the vast majority of the contributors; as many of them represented entire families, the number of donors came to form a substantial proportion of the refugee community. The most common surnames in the list were the classic German-Jewish names Stern, Rosenthal and Goldschmidt (if one includes its anglicised version, Goldsmith).

### Extracts from speeches given at the handing-over ceremony of the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund, 8 November 1965

#### Address by Sir Hans A. Krebs FRS

To me has fallen the privilege of handing over a cheque to the President of the British Academy. This cheque and the efforts leading up to it are no more than a token, a small token, of the deep sense of indebtedness harboured by all of us who came to this country as refugees and were given here a new home – not merely a shelter, but a true home.

What this country of our adoption gave us was not just a new home and livelihood. What we also found was a new and better way of life, a society whose attitudes to life were in many ways very different from what we had been accustomed to, and, I dare say, accustomed to not only under Nazi rule. Coming from an atmosphere of political oppression and persecution, of hate and violence, of lawlessness, blackmail and intrigue, we found here a spirit of friendliness, humanity, tolerance and fairness. We found a society where people of many different dispositions, races, convictions and abilities lived together harmoniously and yet vigorously.

We saw them argue without quarrelling, quarrel without suspecting, suspect without abusing, criticise without vilifying or ridiculing, praise without flattering, being vehement without being brutal.

#### Address by Lord Robbins, President of the British Academy

I find this a very notable and, for me, a very moving occasion. The arrival here in the inter-war period of those of you who came from Nazi persecution was a painful symptom of what was going on in Central Europe – episode after episode, culminating in outrages more frightful than have ever before occurred in civilised history. But it was a circumstance which brought great benefit to this country, great benefit in the world of scientific and humane learning, great benefit in music and the arts, and in technical and economic affairs, and not only here indeed, but also throughout the remaining free world ... Speaking personally, as an academic, I would like to testify to these benefits, to the life-enhancing stimulus which the arrival of Continental scholars brought to the faculty of those universities which were fortunate enough to be in a position to afford them asylum.

## Lectures and Fellowships

The money raised by the Fund was formally handed over to the British Academy at a ceremony on 8 November 1965, in the appropriately grand setting of Saddlers' Hall, just off Cheapside in the heart of the City. The date was doubtless chosen to be as close as possible to the anniversary of the pogroms of 9-10 November 1938. At the ceremony, Sir Hans Krebs formally handed over the cheque in the name of the refugees to Lord Robbins, who accepted it on behalf of the British Academy (Figure 5). Victor Ross and Werner M. Behr, co-chairmen of the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund Committee, signed the document giving the proceeds of the Fund to the Academy 'to be used for the award of research fellowships in the field of the humanities and the holding of an annual lecture.'

Twenty-three 'Thank-Offering to Britain' lectures have been held, starting in 1966, when Lord Robbins spoke on the subject 'Of Academic Freedom'. Among the lecturers were such outstanding public figures as Roy Jenkins, Ralf Dahrendorf, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Arnold Goodman, William Armstrong, Robert Blake and Stuart Hampshire, as well as three refugees, Arthur Koestler, Otto Kahn-Freund and, in 2004, Claus Moser.<sup>4</sup> The first Research Fellowship was awarded in 1967; it has become one of the most prestigious awards in the arts and social sciences and has been awarded to numerous leading scholars in their fields. Recent recipients include Patricia Clavin, for work on the League of Nations, Alexander Lingas, for research into Byzantine chant, building on the work of the refugee musicologist Egon Wellesz, and Eugene Rogan, for his study of the Middle Eastern and North African theatres of war, 1914-20.



**Figure 5**  
Ceremony to hand over the 'Thank-You Britain' Fund, 8 November 1965. From left to right: Lord Robbins, President of the British Academy; Mr Werner M. Behr; Professor Sir Hans A. Krebs FRS. Photo: *Jewish Chronicle*.

To mark the 50th Anniversary of the Thank-Offering to Britain Fund, an appeal has been launched to raise further donations to strengthen the Fund for future years. Patrons include Lord (John) Krebs, son of Sir Hans Krebs, and the late Lord Moser. So far, 130 contributions have already been received – from members of the Association of Jewish Refugees and others. For more details, or to make a gift, please contact Jennifer Hawton, Development Officer ([020 7969 5258](tel:02079695258), [j.hawton@britac.ac.uk](mailto:j.hawton@britac.ac.uk)).

4. A list of the Thank-Offering to Britain Fund Lectures can be found at [www.britishacademy.ac.uk/lectures/tob.cfm](http://www.britishacademy.ac.uk/lectures/tob.cfm)