

CONNECTED THROUGH THE JOURNAL

During its eighty year history the AJR Journal has regularly carried search notices and other calls to action, resulting in many of our readers establishing connections with other readers. One such example is our 2G member Diana Cook, who recently connected through a notice in the Journal with the German academic Dr Dominique Miething, only to find that the subject of their correspondence had herself been a noted contributor to these pages over 70 years ago. They share their story, “Saved by a pacifist”:

Diana explains:

It was some time after my refugee mother died when I at last felt able to sort out boxes of personal papers and photos that I had inherited. A newspaper cutting from the Yorkshire Times, dated 1961, floated out of a pile of documents I had stacked up. I recognised the woman in the photo immediately. She was dressed in graduation cap and gown and smiling broadly, having been just awarded an honorary degree by Leeds University. I knew her as ‘Tante Martha’, a lady beloved and highly respected by my parents.

I had memories of visiting her and her sisters (the ‘Aunties’) when I was a child. We would regularly drive to Leeds from our home in Hull for tea and cake on a Sunday afternoon. I knew that Martha Steinitz was Jewish and had left Germany after the first World War. She became a much-loved teacher of German language classes at Swarthmore (a Quaker centre for adult education), and she had enabled some of her large family – four sisters of her nine siblings – to make their home with her. My parents always spoke of

her as a remarkably learned and cultured person, but as a child this went rather over my head. My mother, then Margot Pogorzelski (1920-2014), aged nineteen, had stayed with Tante Martha when she fled Nazi Germany, and before she became a student nurse at St James’s Hospital.

I remember their small, dark and gloomy terraced house, feeling bored as the conversation was in German, and there were no toys or pets to play with. I sat under the dining table and amused myself with the fringes on the green chenille tablecloth until I was offered cake.

Like so many other descendants of Jewish refugees, I am often haunted by the questions I never thought to ask. As I found out more about her escape, and the fate of my mother’s family, I wanted to know more about Tante Martha. I knew that she sponsored mum by paying £50 – a considerable sum in 1939 – to enable her to leave Nazi Germany. But I never asked about how they were connected, who she really was, and whether any more lives were saved by her generosity.

Having searched the internet and archives at Friends House in London (I presumed she was a Quaker) I drew a blank. I found out that she had been secretary of War Resisters’ International (WRI), a worldwide pacifist network which still exists today. Then, reading an article in the March 2024 issue of the *AJR Journal*, about Esther Simpson, another Leeds Jew and Quaker, I wrote to the Editor wondering if any reader knew more about ‘Tante Martha’. My notice appeared in the April 2024 issue. Two months later, I received an email from Dr Dominique Miething at the Freie Universität in Berlin. He was carrying out archival research on inter-war pacifist women; Martha Steinitz was one of these and he was writing her biography. I was astonished and delighted.

Dominique takes up the story:

When I encountered Diana’s letter, I recognized her name immediately, because four years earlier, I had come across some of her correspondence with the late Renate Steinitz, author of the family story: *Eine deutsche jüdische Familie wird zerstreut* (2nd edition, 2016). These



Diana Cook and Dominique Miething at the Mendelssohn-Remise, Berlin, 22 May 2025

documents were archived in the attic of a family home belonging to some of the Berlin Steinitz family members, whom I had contacted in early 2020. Now being able to get in touch with Diana suddenly presented me with a wonderful opportunity to speak to one of the few people in our times who had met the remarkable Martha Steinitz.

She was born on 11 March 1889, in the Upper Silesian region of today’s Chorzów, Poland. Very few details are known about her youth. Even when she emerged in the “No More War” movement in Berlin after WWI, the written evidence of her commitment to peace is sparse at first. However, beginning with her leadership role in the German Branch of the WRI, Steinitz quickly became a transnational mediator between the British and German peace movements.

Moving to England in late 1924, Steinitz enjoyed the country’s more liberal atmosphere. Her move was motivated, in part, by her friendship with the Whiting family, renowned members of the Leeds Quaker community. She was deeply impressed by their humanitarian work for reconciliation. She also admired the courage of the thousands of British conscientious objectors and tried to make their fates known to the German public after WWI.

Steinitz continued to campaign for the global outlawing of war and for the right to conscientious objection to military service. To this end, she worked closely with Fenner Brockway (1888-1988) and

Herbert Runham Brown (1879-1949), and corresponded with Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, and Martin Buber, among others, and published prolifically. From the mid-1930s on, her cherished principle of nonviolence found a new form of expression in adult education, teaching at least four German classes per week. Occasionally, she also offered courses in art and music history, and later also added courses on Jewish culture and religion, Zionism and against antisemitism.

In September 1933, Steinitz was granted British citizenship. Using her relative privilege of a safe home and a small income, she then saved the lives not only of some of her sisters and her nephew Werner Goerke, but also of Diana's mother Margot and of other persecuted people such as friends from the German peace movement.

Using her contacts with the Jewish Refugees' Committee (founded by Otto Schiff in Spring 1933), the AJR, and the WRI, she helped Jewish and non-Jewish refugees on their way to Britain. Long-standing friendships, for example with



Margot Pogorzelski in 1943

Esther Simpson (1903-1996) the secretary of the Academic Assistance Council in London, enhanced her network.

In cooperation with the Leeds Jewish Refugees Committee (the counterpart to the Quakers' Leeds Committee for Non-Jewish Refugees) Steinitz personally offered evening classes from June 1940 for those new arrivals who wanted to learn English. Reflecting on these interactions, she wrote in the May 1946 issue of *AJR Information*: "From the time of their arrival it has been my object to get them into personal touch with my numerous English friends, with the result that all those Jewish refugees who wished to move out of their somewhat confined circle were able to form valuable friendships, widening their horizon and, incidentally, that of their Gentile neighbours and friends."



Martha Steinitz at the Honorary Degree Ceremony, Leeds University, 18 May 1961

More than half a decade later, Steinitz's activities were still remembered by Caesar Caspar Aronsfeld (1910-2002; see *AJR Information*, September 1952, p. 5), who had also fled to Leeds and played a key role in setting up what is now the Wiener Holocaust Library in London.

On 24 June 1966 Steinitz died unexpectedly in Leeds, where she had resided for four decades.

Perhaps it is now time to commemorate Martha Steinitz – for instance, with a Leeds Civic Trust Blue Plaque?

Letters to the Editor

The Editor reserves the right to shorten correspondence submitted for publication and respectfully points out that the views expressed in the letters published are not necessarily the views of the AJR. Please address any letters to editorial@ajr.org.uk.

ORT EXPLAINED

The initials ORT deserve a more accurate commentary than David Herman's assertion (December 2025) that they stand for Organisation for Rehabilitation through Training. This odd designation was adopted purely to give the English version the same initials as the Russian original. The literal meaning of the latter - *obshchestvo remeslyennovo truda* - is Society for Skilled-Trades Labour. The point being to enable young Jewish men to qualify as skilled manual operatives (plumbers, mechanics, stonemasons or whatever) and thereby earn a reasonable and dignified living and not be confined to itinerant peddling whether of liquor ("Bronfenbrenner") or haberdashery. This is an important fragment of social history.

Peter Oppenheimer, Oxford

WINTON'S LEGACY DOWN UNDER

The interesting report by Debra Barnes (December) on AJR's recent visit to Prague prompted me to reflect on the following coincidence.

My cousins Eva (b.1926) and Anita (b.1931) Graetzer arrived on a Winton Kindertransport in March 1939. Their parents Siegfried and Herta (sister of my father Max) were sadly unable to leave our hometown of Olomouc and perished, together with my grandmother Paula and so many other relatives.

After my own family's escape in July 1939 both girls joined us in Harpenden where we all lived till 1945. Eva married a refugee from Stuttgart, Kurt Weinstein, in 1946. They had a son, Eric, then emigrated to New Zealand in 1952, when

Kurt also anglicised his name to Ken Winton.

Fast forward to 2026 and Eric Winton now lives in Sydney and has two married sons (Ariel and Daniel) and four grandchildren. I guess Sir Nicholas Winton would be amused to know that among his 'children' there are now 10 Wintons living in Australia!

Peter Briess, London NW3

STAMPS

When sending post of any kind to the AJR office please take care to use only the NEW style stamps which have a barcode alongside them. Letters or parcels using the old stamps incur the AJR, as the recipient, an additional charge.

The AJR Team