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0521631874 - Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust

Louise London

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Whitehall and the Jews is the most comprehensive study to date of the British response to the plight of European Jewry under Nazism. It contains the definitive account of immigration controls on the admission of refugee Jews to the United Kingdom, and reveals the doubts and dissent that lay behind British policy.

British self-interest consistently limited humanitarian aid to Jews. Refuge was severely restricted during the Holocaust, and little attempt made to save lives. Louise London nonetheless brings out the compassionate side of Whitehall, and the real concerns of individual mandarins. Certain officials and ministers within the government were responsive to arguments for more generous policies towards the Jews, and the government did permit some admissions on a purely humanitarian basis. After the war, the British government delayed announcing whether refugees would obtain permanent residence, reflecting the government's aim of avoiding long-term responsibility for large numbers of homeless Jews. The balance of state self-interest against humanitarian concern in refugee policy is an abiding theme of *Whitehall and the Jews*, one of the most important contributions to the understanding of the Holocaust and Britain yet published.

LOUISE LONDON is uniquely qualified to write this book. Herself the daughter of Jewish refugees, she combines historical knowledge with considerable legal experience as a solicitor specialising in immigration law. She has published and lectured widely on British immigration controls and refugees, and has taught at Royal Holloway and University College London. *Whitehall and the Jews* is her first book.

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To my mother and father

Lucie London (née Meissner)

born Vienna, 1918

and Heinz London

born Bonn, 1907, died Oxford, 1970

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Preface

My parents came to England as Jewish refugees. My father delayed his departure from Nazi Germany only to complete his Breslau Ph.D degree. He arrived in Oxford in early 1934 to join the group of refugee low temperature physicists led by Franz Simon at the University's Clarendon Laboratory. My mother came from Vienna in March 1939 to start a job as a domestic servant in a private home in Bedford. They first met in Birmingham at a party celebrating VE Day and married the following year. They went to live at Harwell in Berkshire, near the government research establishment where my father worked, while my mother brought up their four children. I grew up hardly aware of my parents' past hardships. They explained that they had been persecuted by the Nazis because they were Jews. I heard about some of the less pleasant aspects of their experience as refugees in England. But neither of my parents harboured resentment over the decision to intern them in 1940. I heard them express only gratitude to the British government. I assumed that the government had welcomed Jewish refugees with open arms and that their acceptance as permanent residents had been automatic. It was only in 1985, when the British government introduced a visa requirement to stem the flow of Tamil asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, that I first became interested in how the government had responded to my parents' generation of refugees. By then I was a solicitor specialising in immigration cases. I learned that in 1938 the Home Office had introduced visa requirements to exclude refugee Jews. My curiosity increased. Further reading made me realise that key aspects of British policy towards European Jews in the Nazi period had yet to be explored. The decision to write this book was the result.

I gratefully acknowledge financial assistance for my research from a number of sources. My doctoral studies were funded by Queen Mary and Westfield College of the University of London, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Central Research Fund of the University of London and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York. The project of writing this book received funding from the Oxford

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Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, the Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation and the British Academy.

I thank for their assistance the institutions and staff of the BBC Written Archives Centre, Birmingham University Library, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Bodleian Library, the British Library, Cambridge University Library, the Foreign Office Library, the Imperial War Museum, the Institute of Historical Research, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, the Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Liverpool University Library, the National Sound Archive, the Parkes Library of the University of Southampton, the Rothschild Archive, the Wiener Library, the library of University College London, the Archives Nationales in France and, in the United States, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Columbia University Library, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, the Leo Baeck Institute, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the US National Archives and the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research.

I am particularly indebted to the staff of the Public Record Office at Kew for their kindness and assistance. I received valuable advice from Pat Andrews and Richard Ponman of the Cabinet Office Historical Section. I thank the Home Office Departmental Records Officer for granting access to certain closed records. I never managed to gain access to closed records on policy concerning refugee immigration. Many of these were eventually transferred to the Public Record Office, but too late, so far as this book is concerned, for it to be possible to do more than include a few additional references.

Crown copyright material in the Public Record Office (PRO) is reproduced by permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The Neville Chamberlain papers are quoted by permission of Birmingham University Library; the Rothschild Archives by permission of Sir Evelyn de Rothschild; papers in the possession of the Home Office by permission of the Home Office Departmental Records Officer.

My special thanks go to the many former refugees, refugee workers, civil servants and others who kindly spared the time to answer my questions and share their experiences with me. Their names appear in the list of interviews at the end of the book.

For the correct identification of illustration 4 (p. 120) I am most grateful to Mr Michael Wellman, who was himself on this transport and knew three of the older boys in the photo.

I wish to express my gratitude to certain people who have given me particular assistance in taking this project forward. My supervisors, David Cesarani, George Peden, Ken Young and Graham Zelik, gave support and guidance. Tony Kushner offered encouragement and

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advice. Vernon Bogdanor, Eva Hoffman and Peter Prince kindly commented on an early draft of the book. My friend Sara Bershtel generously spared the time to offer detailed comments on the typescript, for which I am deeply grateful. I also wish to thank a large number of my friends and members of my family for much kind help and encouragement.

My most heartfelt thanks go to Andrew McDonald, my husband. This book would not have been finished without Andrew's endlessly patient support and his commitment to its completion. I am especially grateful for his forthright and searching comments on draft chapters. I am also greatly indebted to him for giving me time to write, especially in the final stages of working on the typescript, when our daughter Juliet was absorbing much of my attention. Lastly, thank you to Juliet, the sweetest little girl there ever was.

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Abbreviations

AAC	Academic Assistance Council
ADAC	Aliens Deportation Advisory Committee
AJDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
ANJSC	Aliens and Nationality Joint Standing Committee
BCRC	British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia
Bermuda Report	‘Report to the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom from their delegates to the Conference on the Refugee Problem held at Bermuda, April 19–29, 1943’, 29 April 1943, PRO FO 371/36725, W6711/6711/48
CAW	Sub-committee on the Treatment of Aliens in Time of War
CBF	Central British Fund for the Relief of German Jewry
CCJR	Central Council for Jewish Refugees
CGJ	Council for German Jewry
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CO	Colonial Office
COM	Committee on Overseas Manpower
CRTF	Czech Refugee Trust Fund
DO	Dominions Office
FO	Foreign Office
GEC	Germany Emergency Committee (of the Religious Society of Friends)
GJAC	German Jewish Aid Committee
HO	Home Office
IGC	Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees
IRO	International Refugee Organisation
JFC	Joint Foreign Committee (of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association)
JRC	Jewish Refugees Committee
JTS	Jews’ Temporary Shelter
LCC	London County Council

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Long	Breckinridge Long papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC
MCCG	Movement for the Care of Children from Germany
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
Meynell	Sir Francis Meynell papers, Cambridge University Library
MOLANS	Ministry of Labour and National Service
MP	Member of Parliament
NC	Neville Chamberlain papers
NCRNT	National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror
NJCSR	National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief
Noel-Baker	Lord Noel-Baker papers, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge
PCD	Passport Control Department
PCO	Passport Control Officer
PRO	Public Record Office
RA	Rothschild Archive, London
SOF	Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
SPSL	Society for the Protection of Science and Learning
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Adminis- tration
USNA	United States National Archives
WJC	World Jewish Congress
WRB	War Refugee Board

For explanation of references in the notes to documents in the Public
Record Office, see the list of archives consulted in the bibliography.