

OBITUARIES

Peter Hart, 12 August 1914 – 6 February 2012

When still young, Peter was apprenticed to the famous Berlin engineering company Orenstein and Koppel, which specialised in railways, escalators and heavy equipment and is still known today. This ended in 1933, when the Nazis forced out all Jews on the threat of withdrawal of state contracts.

To fulfil his dream of becoming a hotelier he was forced to leave his comfortable home, his parents Arthur and Helena, and his sister Ursula and move to Paris to find work. He was 18, penniless and spoke only schoolboy French, though later he would speak five languages fluently. He worked his way through all departments of hotels, ending in the kitchens learning to cook, an occupation he enjoyed until his death.

In 1939 Peter joined Baron de

Rothschild's Co-ordinating Committee for help and protection. The Committee trained refugees from Austria and Germany for manual jobs, which was all that was expected to be available to them. On the outbreak of war, the refugees and the Committee were interned in France as 'enemy aliens'. Peter recalled in his book *Journey into Freedom*: 'I was determined not to rot in the camp forever and made up my mind that I must find my way to England somehow.'

In 1940 Peter was moved to another camp in now-occupied France and joined Canadian and British civilians, later being freed and sent over the border to the



unoccupied zone. Here, betrayed by a farmer and sent to the camp at Septfonds, he endured appalling conditions for over two years.

Eventually Peter crossed the Pyrenees into Spain. The bravery of those who aided refugees was something he never forgot. In November 1942 he was arrested again and put in the Spanish camp Miranda del Ebro. On his eventual release, he worked in Madrid for a time for David Blickenstaff of the American Joint Committee.

In 1943 Peter made his way to Britain, enrolled in the Pioneer Corps, and in 1944 was transferred to the Intelligence Corps, where he eavesdropped on the conversations of German POWs. The intelligence he acquired was invaluable for the planned advance into Germany. Peter ended his wartime career by being assigned in 1945 to Wilton Park, where German POWs debated the processes of democracy with visiting dignitaries.

Demobbed in 1947, Peter returned to the hotel trade, working in the Howard Hotel in London. Here he came up with the idea for the first-ever hotel accommodation service, HOTAC, which was to become a world-famous company and lead to Peter's involvement with governmental committees on the development of tourism in the UK.

Having always loved the arts, Peter and his wife Lili, herself a talented poet, organised 189 outings for members of the Leo Baeck Lodge to art galleries, notable buildings, the theatre and opera. Peter served as the Lodge's Warden for six consecutive years and launched their annual talent contest. He created a link between the Lodge and the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition and supported their refugee and survivor interviews. This link led to sponsorship of the annual Holocaust Memorial Day event for over ten years.

Peter published two books: his wartime story *Journey into Freedom* and *Tales in Tandem*, a compilation of stories, fiction and non-fiction written with his wife, but each independently.

Lili Hart

At the age of 87 cancer was diagnosed but he was enabled to stay in his own home until the end, a patriarch, reaping some of the return for the love and care he had shown to others during his lifetime.

Edgar leaves Esther and three children – Walter, Joyce and Sylvia – and eight grandchildren – Nechama, Ben, Charlotte, Jacob, Richard, Raphael, Bracha and Zachariah.

The Rothschild family

Edgar Rothschild, 11 August 1924 – 16 February 2012

Edgar Herman Julius Rothschild was born in Hanover, only son of Landgerichtsrat Walter Rothschild and Charlotte, née Fiedler. When he was ten, the rise of the Nazi Party meant that his father was forced out of his position and the family moved to Baden-Baden due to family links and to be nearer the French border. However, Walter made no real attempt to leave Germany, saying 'When the judges leave there will be no justice here any more.' This did not prevent him from being arrested and taken to Dachau on Kristallnacht. Charlotte somehow arranged his release a month later and the pair were able to move to Switzerland, where Walter died in 1950 from his injuries.

Edgar himself was sent for safety to England (though the original idea had been for him to continue to America). He attended Seaford College for a while, then began work in a factory in London and, due to the Blitz, moved to Bradford to stay with the family of his former school head teacher from Baden-Baden, Dr Artur Flehinger, who had, through a Quaker initiative, found a position at Bradford Grammar School. This sequence of coincidences led to his identification with this Yorkshire city and community.

Following service with the RAF as a meteorologist in India and Europe, he settled in Bradford, where he met, and in 1952 married, Esther Bergson-Brown. Following a period as a draughtsman at English Electric's Phoenix Works at Thornbury in Bradford, he became a mathematics teacher.

Although he married Esther at Brad-

ford Hebrew Congregation in Spring Gardens, he had been a member of the Bradford Synagogue in Bowland Street from 1948 and became an active member, serving for decades in various honorary positions – Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-Chairman and then Chairman. In 1984 he was appointed a Life President of the congregation. A measure of the family's involvement in the synagogue is that two of his children became rabbis and the third ran a synagogue and a Jewish choir.

Edgar was a man of passionate interests, including music (in his later years he took piano lessons and struggled with complex Schubert pieces), woodwork (he established a fully-equipped workshop in his home), model railways (an enormous layout in the attic reflected the Alpine landscape he loved, but incorporated the station at Baden-Baden!), wine- and beer-making, electronics (for which he gained a diploma at Bradford College), bookbinding and piano-tuning. As a handyman, he largely rebuilt and furnished the family home in Heaton.

He reached out with unassuming friendship to the underdogs of society, never forgetting his own formative experiences as an outcast and refugee. He attended Bradford AJR meetings and was active in the Bradford Community Relations Council and Neighbourhood Watch. His chief love apart from his family was the succession of family dogs and injured birds and animals that came into his tender care.

