

“It was difficult. But when you have to, it is surprising what you can do.”

“Having been a refugee, it makes you aware and understanding of other people’s handicaps and suffering.”

Changing Countries

The Experience and Achievement of German-speaking Exiles
from Hitler
in Britain, from 1933 to today

London: Libris, 2002, 260 pages, Hardback, £ 29.95, Paperback £ 14.95

Oral History Project at the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile
Studies at London University

(Marietta Bearman, Charmian Brinson, Anthony Grenville, Stefan Howald, Marian Malet,
Jennifer Taylor, Irene Wells, Erna Woodgate)

Edited by Marian Malet and Anthony Grenville

Refugees are a hotly debated issue. Each generation has to come to terms with different forms of emigration and immigration.

This book puts the matter in a historical perspective. It is based on interviews with over 30 women and men who fled from Hitler and the Nazis in the nineteen thirties and sought refuge in Britain. The former refugees talk frankly of their experience – their reasons, religious or political, for leaving Germany and Austria, the trauma of departure and arrival, their existence as ‘enemy aliens’ in wartime Britain, their struggles to learn English and find a job, the challenges of settling down and their relation with the former home country.

These are invaluable testimonies, moving as well as uplifting. They show a spirit of survival, against high odds, and make this work an important historic document. Furthermore, in discussing the testimonies in nine thematic chapters, the book contributes to the ongoing debate on exile and Diaspora, on assimilation and integration. It shows what forging a new identity means in everyday life, in lived reality. It argues that assimilation is not a one-way-street. The achievements and careers by the former refugees in fields as diverse as art history, architecture, music, dance, education, publishing and industry are living proof of their commitment and contribution to British society.

The book is written throughout in English and requires no knowledge of German.

»this book shows how productive oral history can be ... invaluable and deeply moving« (*Modern Language Review*)

»a most interesting and readable book, a well-balanced scholarly work which will also appeal to a general readership.« (*German Historical Institute Bulletin*)