

The Job offer that saved a family



VCR: Who do you think you are? The complete second series Disc 1

On the disc I have go to the scene selection under Stephen fry. Either start with Vienna Revisited (Appox 25 mins to end) or Leopold Neumann (12 mins approx). If you start with Vienna Revisited it is all fairly self explanatory, if at Leopold Neumann you will need to give a bit of background.

The focus of this work is to consider how the Holocaust should be remembered so focus on:-

Stephens's reaction on finding a plaque to his grandmother
Why a concrete wall has had to be constructed round the Jewish cemetery where his great grandfather is buried.
The efforts made in the village to restore the synagogue
Why the Yad Vashem website was important for Stephen
The testimony the one survivor had written for Stephen

Stephen Fry's grandfather came to the UK as an economic migrant in 1930's.
What would have happened if he had been 'sent back'?

NB beware this film contains one, understandable, use of a strong sexual swear word

Background taken from the bbc website www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory

The story that pricked Stephen's interest the most was that of his beloved maternal grandfather, Martin Newman. Martin's actual name was Neumann, and he was a Jew of eastern European descent.

Martin had left Surany, a small town in what is now Slovakia, in 1927, with his wife, Rosa, and their daughter Gertrude. They settled in Bury St Edmunds, England. During the 1920s, Britain was keen to develop its sugar beet industry and Bury St Edmunds was chosen as the best place to situate a factory.

In Surany, Martin was working as an agricultural advisor in the largest sugar beet factory in Europe, and was hired to teach the British a thing or two about the cultivation of sugar beet.

By the late 1920s, with the spectre of Nazism beginning to loom in Germany, widespread anti-Semitism was already affecting the lives of millions of Jews across mainland Europe. What had been the fate of those Neumanns who had stayed behind when Martin came to England?

Martin served in the Austro-Hungarian army in World War One. Despite being just eighteen years old when he volunteered, he won a medal on the Eastern Front - where millions of men lost their lives - in the battle for Romania. He worked his way from the rank of private to corporal.

When the war was over, he visited some distant cousins, the Brauns, in Vienna. A member of the Braun family, Rosa, would eventually become his wife.

The Brauns were members of Vienna's 200,000-strong Jewish community. Stephen paid an emotional visit to the house in which they lived, and was startled to see a plaque commemorating the house's inhabitants, among them Rosa's parents - Stephen's great-grandfather and great-grandmother - Berta and Samuel.

They had remained there until 1942, at the height of the Nazi terror, when they were deported to a ghetto in Riga, Latvia, along with 65,000 other Viennese Jews. Only a small number of those sent to Riga survived. The others, Berta and Samuel among them, were killed.

Stephen's next stop was Surany. Martin and Rosa had moved there in 1924, along with the whole of Martin's extended family, including parents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, cousins, nieces and nephews.

Martin's father, Leopold, died in 1929, but what became of the other Neumanns who remained in Surany? The answer is as tragic as it was inevitable.

Located in what was then Hungary, there was no resistance in Surany to the Nazi's anti-Semitic policies. The lives of the town's Jews were ruined, their property ransacked or burgled, the people deported or murdered. In all, more than 600 Jews from Surany were killed in the Holocaust.

Martin's sister, Reska, was one of those who chose to stay, marrying a man called Tobias Lamm. The couple had children, but during World War Two the whole family was sent to Auschwitz. Some disappeared en route. The others died or were murdered in the camp itself.

Had fate not intervened, in the form of a humble sugar beet factory in Bury St Edmonds, that awful destiny may also have befallen Martin Neumann and his family.