

Jewish refugees' lifeline in the small ads

Families persecuted by Nazis turned to *The Times* to make desperate pleas for domestic work in Britain

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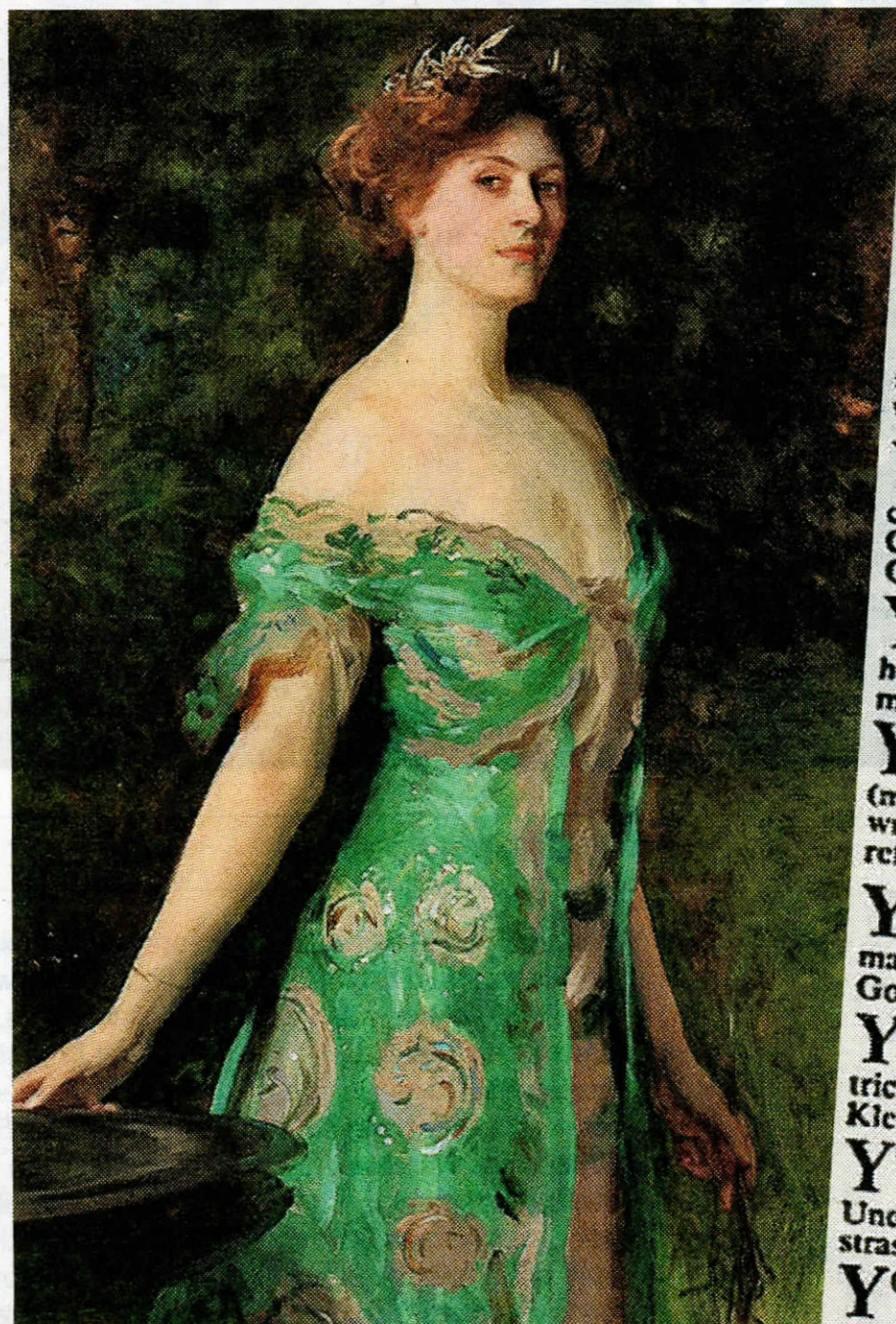
Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany came to this country by boat, by train and by plane. They came in their hundreds and as Hitler's antisemitic persecution gathered pace they came in their thousands. And some — a remarkably large number — came via the classified advertisements of *The Times*.

From 1938 onwards the "Situations Wanted" columns of this newspaper were bombarded with adverts placed by Jews urgently seeking employment in Britain to escape the looming Holocaust.

This week we reported how a dowager duchess, Lady Millicent Hawes, launched a crowdfunding campaign in *The Times* to save a Jewish Viennese family. The offers to work that filled these pages in the run-up to war tell a similar but far wider story: of countless European Jews for whom working as a servant in Britain was the path to survival. The advertisements are simple, increasingly desperate, and often heartbreaking.

"Jewish Viennese Married Couple urgently seek work. Wife capable cook, perfect in housework, hairdressing, manicure, chiropodist: Man, any housework." "Vienna Girl, Jewish, good family, seeks domestic situation as soon as possible." "Infant nurse and kindergarten teacher, knowledge of medicine, diet cook, Jewish, excellent references, seeks position ..."

They offered to work as governesses, housekeepers, nannies, gardeners, chauffeurs, labourers, butlers and handymen. Many of the applicants were overqualified for the positions they sought and some were evidently not poor. "Young married couple (Jewish), stock farmer, landed proprietor, driver. Wife good cook ... seek position as servants in town or country."



A portrait of Lady Millicent Hawes and a section of the small ads that appeared in *The Times* in 1938

But they all had this in common. They feared, rightly, that if they remained under Nazi rule they were doomed to oppression or worse. After the Anschluss of March 1938, when Germany annexed Austria, the advertisements from Austria turned from a trickle into a flood. The jobseekers included Jewish Poles, Hungarians and Czechoslovakians.

This flood of applications to work as domestic servants came about through a British bureaucratic wrinkle. At a time of high unemployment Jewish immigrants had to demonstrate that they would not be a burden on the state, by proving they would be bringing business to Britain or by obtaining a letter confirming employment.

But there was still a high demand for servants and a "domestic service

permit" was easier to obtain than other work permits. In an echo of modern times, these were jobs that British-born workers were reluctant to take on.

In 1937 the National Council of Women urged the government to "grant domestic permits freely to approved young women of other nationalities". In the early months of 1939, 400 domestic service permits were made available every week. By the end of the year 20,000 people, mostly young women, had entered the country on such visas.

Aware that antisemitism was not restricted to Germany, some of those applying for work avoided describing themselves as Jewish, opting instead for "non-Aryan". Some emphasised that one parent was Christian.

Jewish domestic servants were

DOMESTIC SITUATIONS REQUIRED (continued)

VIENNESE married couple (Jewish), good families, desire posts in country house. Wife, 31, pleasant appearance, fond of children and animals, cook, milliner. Husband, 48, as house-parlourman-valet. —Landau, Schottenring 9, Vienna 1.

YOUNG Jewish Married Couple, wife Cook-General, husband perfect Chauffeur, mechanic, and all-round man, want situations together in a good family. —Please write to Egon Grünberg, Vienna 3, Keinergasse 4-25.

YOUNG Viennese Jewish Married Couple of good family want post: wife perfect in hairdressing, manicure, and lady's service, Companion; man experienced Chauffeur, able to do any housework. —Weinstein, 38-22, Gr. Mohrengasse, Vienna 2.

YOUNG Viennese Jewish Married Couple seek post in household or as Caretakers; man chauffeur, good horseman, wife perfect in housework, cooking. —Frimmet, 4, Grillgasse, Vienna 11.

YOUNG Viennese Couple; perfect English; wife perfect in housekeeping, trained bedagogue for children (music teacher); man Servant, secretary, shorthand-typing, chauffeur; seek post: would separate; best references. —Wolf, 4, Hollandstrasse, Vienna 2.

YOUNG Viennese Married Couple seek post: man (28) servant, chauffeur; wife (27) Parlourmaid, manicure, every sort of handwork. —Knepler, 9, Gonzagagasse, Vienna 1.

YOUNG Viennese Couple (36) seek post: wife perfect Cook, versed in all housework; man Gardener, electrician, locksmith, and able to do repairs. —Harth, 7, Kleine Pfarrgasse, Vienna 2.

YOUNG Married Couple, wife capable cook, man versed in all housework, seek post in England. —Under "Trustworthy" to Annoncen-Dutka, 8, Schulstrasse, Vienna 1.

YOUNG Married Couple (Jewish), stock farmer, landed proprietor, driver, wife excellent cook, all work in the household, seek position as servants in Town or country. —Max Hauer, Wolkersdorf.

my owner of a white elephant lend rent free in return for the working of the land, payment of rates, and boundless gratitude?"

But while the adverts represented an avenue of possible escape they are also a reminder of the restrictions on Jewish immigration. We rightly celebrate the Kindertransport which brought 10,000 Jewish children to Britain but debate still rages around whether this country should have done more to save imperilled Jews.

Some 70,000 Jews from Germany and Nazi-occupied countries found sanctuary in Britain during the war. When Hitler came to power Anglo-Jewish leaders pledged that "all expenses... will be borne by the community without ultimate charge to the state". In 1938, the former prime minister Stanley Baldwin made an impassioned plea:

"Thousands of men, women and children, despoiled of their goods, driven from their homes, are seeking asylum and sanctuary on our doorsteps, a hiding place from the wind and a cover from the tempest."

Yet Jews were allowed into Britain only under strict conditions. In the wake of the Anschluss visas were reintroduced in order, as one official put it, that immigrants could be "selected at leisure and in advance". Some newspapers were actively hostile to Jewish immigration, amid fears that any relaxation of restrictions might provoke further expulsions of Jews by the Nazis and foment British antisemitism.

The possibility of refuge was shut down in September 1939 with the outbreak of war, when the government declared that Britain would no longer accept immigrants from countries with which it was at war or that were enemy-occupied.

It is impossible to know how many of the Jews frantically seeking work found a haven in Britain and how many stayed to face the Holocaust.

On July 28, 1938, Amelie Wurm placed an ad in this paper for her daughter or granddaughter. "19-year-old girl of good Jewish family, seeks post as Nursemaid or Chambermaid ..." Perhaps the girl escaped to Britain. Amelie Wurm did not. She died in Theresienstadt Ghetto near Prague in 1942.

expected to assimilate quickly. An information leaflet entitled *Mistress and Maid* advised new arrivals to "adapt yourself as quickly as possible" while warning employers that these young women were "trying to forget their terrible experiences before they found shelter in this country".

Refugee Jews were broadly welcomed, though there were some startlingly crass reactions. The Jewish publisher George Weidenfeld recalled encountering one London society hostess who asked him: "I hear you come from Germany. Did you know the Goerings?"

Some of the wanted ads in *The Times* were for refugee accommodation. "Empty Country House wanted to accommodate 50-100 young Jewish refugees ... will

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