

Sidney Pollard:

*A Life in History*

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TAURIS ACADEMIC STUDIES  
LONDON • NEW YORK



Sidney Pollard

Published in 2004 by Tauris Academic Studies, an imprint of  
I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd  
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010  
www.ibtauris.com

In the United States of America and in Canada distributed by  
St. Martins Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

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International Library of Twentieth Century History 2

ISBN 1 85043 453 0  
EAN 978 1 85043 453 5

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British  
Library

A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of  
Congress

Library of Congress catalog card: available

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd,  
Bodmin, from camera-ready copy supplied by the author

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The subject of this book is history, meaning both the past itself, and the processes by which it is recorded. This book tells the story of one man who published studies of Britain and Europe looking at the times when they were transformed from being stable, rural societies, into something like the urban economies of the present day. The account in these pages connects the story of Sidney Pollard's own life to the 'history' that appeared in his books. As it does so, it illustrates a general point. All such histories, no matter how objective they might appear, are in some part a coded message connecting the events of the historian's life to the factual material they record. All novels are autobiographical, that much is known, the idea here is that history too is subject to similar rules. The links may be concealed but they exist.

It is only right to acknowledge certain debts that were incurred in the writing of the book. Thanks are owed to a number of friends, colleagues and family members whose ideas have contributed. One of the first people to read the manuscript was my father, a trained economist who witnessed many of the same events as Pollard, if from a different perspective. I am also grateful for the advice I received from colleagues at Sunderland University, including John Burnett, Gill Cookson, John Flanagan, Stuart Howard, Matt Perry, Peter Waldron and Peter Wilson. The university was also good enough to support me through a one-year research fellowship, during which time I was able to study Pollard's papers at leisure. I also appreciate the support I received from Amanda Boll, Stuart Halliday and all the library staff at Sunderland University library for helping me

with access to the Pollard collection, and thank them for their support and encouragement.

Several of Pollard's contemporaries agreed to share their memories of that time, including John Saville of Hull University and the late Royden Harrison of Sheffield and Warwick. I was fortunate to receive advice and encouragement from colleagues of Holmes and Pollard at Sheffield University, including John Halstead, who is also President of the Society for the Study of Labour History, Sean Kelly, David Martin and Richard Thurlow. Don MacRaild helped me to place Pollard's work in the right historiographical context. Colin Holmes, Pollard's literary executor, was a constant source of advice and support. Colin put aside his own research to support my work, and I will always be grateful to him for his assistance.

Other colleagues and friends helped me to locate documents, including Alexis Wearmouth, John Walker of the London Socialist Historians' Group, Alan Campbell of Liverpool University, Karin Christiansen of the Overseas Development Institute, John McIlroy and Sheila Rowbotham from Manchester University.

Three of Pollard's colleagues from the University of Bielefeld, his students Hartmut Berghoff and Dieter Ziegler, and his secretary Wilma Diekmann provided memories. Eric Hobsbawm was an invaluable source. Other comments were received from Peter Alexander of the Rand-Afrikaans University, Robert Brenner of the University of Los Angeles, Berkeley, Rob Bryer of Warwick Business School, Andrew Dawson of Greenwich University, Irma du Plessis of Wits University in South Africa, Richard J. Evans of Cambridge University, Pat Hudson of Cardiff University, Mike Haynes of Wolverhampton University, Ian Inkster of Nottingham Trent University, Cecile Jooste of Vista University in South Africa, Peter Limb of the University of Western Australia, Peter Mathias of Downing College, Cambridge, James Mosley of the St Bride Printing Library in London, Carlo Morelli of Dundee and Harold Pollins of Ruskin College. My partner Anne encouraged me when I needed advice, read drafts and supported me through this long interest in a man whom I never met.

Finally, I would also like to record my gratitude to the surviving members of Pollard's family who answered my requests for information, including Helen, David, Brian and Veronica Pollard, as well as Sidney's cousin Ora Kedem. The Pollards were enormously supportive. They spoke to me at length, providing ideas and memories. They read drafts of the



manuscript, suggesting changes that were incorporated into the final version. However, it must be emphasised that this is by no means an authorised biography, written for, or completely approved by the Pollard family or Pollard's literary executor.

For all of the support I have received, many thanks.



# 1: INTRODUCTION

Sidney Pollard (1925–1998) was among the most important of post-war British historians. He transformed the way in which his contemporaries thought about such important concepts as ‘employment’, ‘poverty’ and ‘management’, ‘economic development’, ‘underdevelopment’ and ‘economic growth’. Yet for all their strengths, Pollard’s books are now too little known in Britain. He lived in this country for most of his life, but the audience before which he was happiest was a European-wide network of distinguished scholars who debated his ideas with real sympathy. In Britain, meanwhile, Pollard has been neglected. The reasons for this ‘failure’ are difficult to explain. Perhaps his books owed too much to the dismal science of economics. The British myth is of a kind and moderate society, unchanged in all essentials through many years, unbiased, ignorant equally of all ideas and strong opinions. Pollard’s history was strongly influenced by European historiography. It took sides. It fitted awkwardly with the work of his contemporaries. An even greater sin: Pollard failed to spice up his works with the private jokes that his friends recall. Yet his ideas were not difficult. What moment in history was more worth studying than the invention of machinery and industry, the processes that made the modern world?

An economic historian by training, Pollard contributed to several key debates in that field. His books discussed the explanations of relative growth,<sup>1</sup> the factors behind the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century,<sup>2</sup> the early history of management,<sup>3</sup> the monetary policy of the inter-war period,<sup>4</sup> and the nature of development in Europe.<sup>5</sup> He wrote

economic history from the perspective of the lives shaped by grand processes. Ideas that threatened to become abstractions in the course of a literature which privileged mathematical data over human experience, became in his hands a living means to explain ordinary people's lives.

More than one subject was changed by his work. Alongside Christopher Hill, Edward Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, Pollard was a member of a generation who democratised our understanding of the past. While previous published histories had concentrated on the story of elite groups, the social historians of the 1950s and 1960s drew attention to marginalised people, including workers, women and immigrants, and used their experiences to re-evaluate the role played by political or business leaders. Pollard's postdoctoral research examining the history of labour in South Yorkshire was one of the first British studies to anticipate the later development of history from below. This was only one of several works he published in labour history.<sup>6</sup> Pollard also contributed to the foundation of one of the main organisations of socialist historians, the Society for the Study of Labour History, and helped to edit its bulletin, today's *Labour History Review*.

The medium in which Pollard's labour history expressed itself was the history of the region. He described workers as the key carriers of regional culture. Workers and regions alike were the victims of history. The role of both was to resist the encroachments of metropolitan elites. Pollard's distinctive ideas began with studies of the regions he knew best, Sheffield and the Peak District. His theory of regional industrialisation rapidly developed to take in other economic areas from countries right across Europe, including Belgium, France, Italy, Germany and Poland. His last book *Marginal Europe* was a study of trans-national economic development in Europe since the Middle Ages. It treated the history of regions in much the same way as Karl Marx had discussed the history of social classes, or Raúl Prebisch the story of nations,<sup>7</sup> as if they were actors engaged in a self-conscious rivalry in which even marginal or dispossessed groups could flourish.<sup>8</sup> Pollard drew up rules to explain how marginal regions could succeed, and the limits that remained to block their growth. Historians have still not yet absorbed the full implications of that book.

In his lifetime, Sidney Pollard's work received wide acclaim. He published some thirty-eight full-length books, half a dozen pamphlets, over one hundred and thirty book chapters

and journal articles, and many more book reviews besides. His study of *The Genesis of Modern Management* secured the 1967 Thomas Newcomen Award for the best work of business history published in America between 1964 and 1966.<sup>9</sup> Pollard was appointed Visiting Professor at a dozen universities including Berkeley in California, Bar-Ilan in Israel, the University of Bielefeld in West Germany, Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, Melbourne University, the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, the Rockefeller Study Centre in Bellagio, the European University in Florence, as well as Exeter, Delaware, Liverpool, Zürich, and the International University of Japan.

In 1990, Pollard was made a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. Two volumes of *Festschriften* were presented to him, one in English in 1991 and one in German in 1995,<sup>10</sup> and he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from Sheffield University in 1992. Although he wrote mostly in English, Pollard's books were translated into Italian, Farsi and Japanese.<sup>11</sup> He also published widely in German.<sup>12</sup>

'Few of his generation', wrote Pollard's fellow labour historian John Saville, 'have equalled the range or excellence of [his] writings.' His former colleague Colin Holmes has placed Pollard's work in the context of the many personal obstacles he faced, 'Pollard was one of the conspicuous success stories who carved out a substantial academic career in a context he could hardly have envisaged when he arrived lonely and anxious as a thirteen year old refugee at Harwich.'<sup>13</sup>

George Boyer dubbed Pollard 'one of the leading economic historians of the postwar era'.<sup>14</sup> Don MacRaild, a historian of labour and migration, has also described Pollard as 'a great scholar'. Pollard was perhaps best known to a world audience as an historian of Britain's industrial rise and fall, although as the author of noted studies of European economic history his reach, like his recognition and his talent, was formidable.<sup>15</sup>

Yet for all the quality of his work, little has been written on Sidney Pollard's life. The historical record contains a few obituaries written by surviving colleagues and friends,<sup>16</sup> as well as the short biographical accounts that appeared in his lifetime.<sup>17</sup> We possess the official short record of Pollard's life, which appeared in various biographical dictionaries,<sup>18</sup> as well as one full-length autobiographical text, 'In Search of a Social Purpose'. That last memoir was published as part of a collection that addressed the lives of the generation of young Germans who found refuge and became historians in Britain. It appeared

shortly before Pollard's death.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of this study is to rescue the man behind the books, connecting the concealed life history that appears in Pollard's published works to a more private narrative, which can be traced through his personal documents and the witness testimony of Pollard's surviving family and friends.

## Structure

The contents of this book are organised as follows. The first chapter is biographical. It deals mainly with Pollard's youth, and the events of his escape from Vienna. Following Hitler's annexation of Austria, the young man was forced to flee for his life, before finding refuge in Britain. A second biographical chapter describes Pollard's early attempts to win recognition as a historian. Pollard eventually held research and then teaching posts at Sheffield University, before moving to Bielefeld in West Germany in 1980. The third main chapter deals with the political ideas of the historian, especially his early left-wing politics. Pollard was briefly a student member of the Communist Party, before later identifying with the more mainstream traditions of British Labourism. This is followed by a fourth section, which examines Pollard's work in the field of labour history, including his *History of Labour in Sheffield*, a pioneering work of British labour history.

This book also considers Pollard's study of managers and the part they played in the British Industrial Revolution. Pollard was one of the very first historians to take any sustained interest in the changing relationships between owners, managers and factory workers. In a linked set of works, he also provided one of the most important and original explanations of Britain's post-war economic decline, which is the focus of the following chapter. Pollard blamed the mandarins of the Treasury, and the deflationary instinct of the bankers. The next chapter examines his ideas about Europe, and the part played by regions in industrialisation. The conclusion considers his stature as a historian, and his relationship to the profession, which was not always close. The final section treats Pollard's life through the theme of 'marginality', the subject of his last book *Marginal Europe*.

The writing of this book has been guided by two insights. The first is taken from *Troublemaker*, Kathleen Burk's biography of A. J. P. Taylor. In her preface, Burk has described herself as organising Taylor's life 'with more emphasis on

themes than on a dogged description of his life day by day'. She defended this choice, 'An academic, when looking back on her or his life, thinks in terms of strands: this was my research, this was my teaching, these were my administrative duties, this was my broadcasting or journalism.'<sup>20</sup> This idea fits with aspects of Pollard's character. Here was a man who ordered his correspondence by theme or book, not by date. His correspondence with colleagues was recorded, and neatly boxed. Like Taylor, Pollard thought in terms of subjects, and a thematic structure has been adopted here.

The second such insight is borrowed from Peter Pulzer, another historian who came to Britain from as a child refugee from Nazism. 'Most historical writing', he has suggested, 'is also autobiography.' Professional historians may pose questions in the most objective— or formal—seeming manner, but they write for themselves, to explain moments from their own lives. The questions that historians address and the conclusions they formulate come from the inside. Historians write about certain topics and in certain ways, because the world which they have experienced, 'has features that cry out for explanation'.<sup>21</sup> This biography reads Pollard's many books in this way, for the personal story that lies coded within them.

Peter Pulzer's advice is valuable, but should be applied carefully. One of the most important dilemmas that had to be faced in writing this book, was the question of whether to write about Pollard's life in a way that Pollard himself tended to avoid. The most important single moment of his life was his escape from Nazi-occupied Vienna in 1938. The destruction of his family shaped Pollard's youth. He was left alone and isolated in England, and wandered into a career as an academic, without any strong sense of purpose. The events of the 1930s also shaped the way in which Pollard later cleared a path for his own children. They may even have influenced some of that feeling of dissatisfaction that Pollard occasionally expressed, at the contrast between the official reception of his work, and the full respect that he felt it deserved. Yet Pollard did not complain.

He told his own life-story to just a few of his oldest friends. He never mentioned it once in print until his final memoir appeared, months before his death. Pollard may have worried that any biography would overwhelm the autonomy of his ideas. He did not write in a certain way simply 'because' he had been a refugee. In all his writings, there was a more subtle relationship between his personal situation, the questions that interested him and the answers he found. Any biographer has to

strike a balance between treating the opinions of their subject in a way that their protagonist would have found familiar, and identifying 'external' factors, which may explain the emergence of any one idea. This study is no different.

Finally, one important source for this book has been the collection of Pollard's private papers. Following his death in 1998, his second wife Helen deposited her husband's collection of letters, notebooks, public correspondence and other materials with the library in Sunderland University. The evidence of the papers suggests a complex and diverse life, with a wide range of interests, details of which can now start to be revealed.



## 2: LIFE AND LEARNING

Sidney Pollard was born Siegfried Pollak on 21 April 1925, the second son of Moses Pollak a commercial traveller and Leontine Katz, a teacher. His brother was often ill and young Sigi was brought up effectively as a single child.<sup>1</sup> Moses Pollak's family came from Stry (sometimes also spelled Stryj, Strij or even Strij in English) near Lvov in Galicia, his mother from a family of rabbis in Radautz near Cernauti, and before then Stry. Pollard later explained their meeting, 'As the Russians pushed into Austria's eastern provinces in the early months of the First World War, they marked their progress with anti-Semitic pogroms, and the Hapsburg government as a result helped to evacuate the Jews (or helped them to evacuate themselves) ahead of the Russian armies.' Most of these uprooted Jews found their way to Vienna, including Siegfried's mother. His father had travelled there before 1914, 'to seek his fortune in the capital'.<sup>2</sup> Both eventually settled in Vienna, where Siegfried was born. He was a late child. His mother was thirty-six and his father forty when he arrived.<sup>3</sup> Sigi's cousin Ora Kedem describes the Pollak family home:

The Jewish community in Stryj, like many others in Galicia, was a close-knit society. The two families knew each other, and this was presumably a basis for the later marriage ... They were a highly respected family, in the enviable scale of this traditional society, for being excellent in torah, translated in the generation of our parents into secular education of all brothers and sisters. His generation, or at least the group relevant here,

spanned the whole spectrum, from Talmud to European literature. I believe Leontine taught German, but she never worked in Vienna. One of the sisters was in the town council, a remarkable first for a Jewish woman.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1920s, Vienna played an important part in Jewish life. By 1923, there were 200,000 Jews living in the city, constituting some 10.8 per cent of the population.<sup>5</sup> Vienna was the first step westwards on a path of migration that took people away from the historic areas of Jewish settlement in modern-day Russia, the Ukraine and Poland. Vienna was the border that divided the marginal lands of Eastern Europe from the urban heartlands. Daniel Snowman, the historian of Jewish refugee culture in Britain, observes that many of the people who fled from Hitler came from Vienna, 'You might be a Czech-speaking merchant in Moravia, a schoolteacher from Croatia or Romania, a wealthy Prague industrialist ... if you had ambitions to better yourself, you needed to know German and would probably gravitate sooner or later, if you could, towards Vienna.'<sup>6</sup> According to Kedem, the Pollaks 'were first of all refugees, and later immigrants'. 'Nevertheless, they achieved a reasonable standard. I never knew exactly what Sidney's father did. My contact was with his mother, but ... there was never anything missing in the family. It was a traditional, if not Orthodox home, a well run and immaculate household.'<sup>7</sup>

Siegfried Pollak grew up within smell of a chocolate factory, leaving him with a life-long love of the snack. He received his education at the Chajes Realgymnasium, a Jewish private school, excelling at maths and at music, on the violin. Pollak owned his own violin, and several of his friends have suggested that he could have turned professional.<sup>8</sup> It must have been an outstanding school. Although Pollak studied there only from the age of five to thirteen, and then effectively ceased all studies for the next five years, he was so well equipped that he was later able to pass the London Matric examination, competing with rivals who had received continuous schooling for twelve years.<sup>9</sup> The young Pollak's life was by no means limited to studying. Ora Kedem played frequently at the Pollak home.

Sigi was an only child adored by his parents, not always happy with this admiration, but he took it calmly. He was indeed astonishingly calm and sure for a young boy.

His mother's main message was really that he could excel in anything he undertook, and this was exactly as expected of his family tradition. Sigi and I spent long hours not solving crossword puzzles, but inventing them. When we played with the mechanical sets of the time, matador, it had to be a whole project. At one time we built a loom, and wove a belt on it. I have an older sister and brother, and Sigi was in many ways the fourth. Among our games was writing down as many towns and other categories as you could remember, starting with a given letter. So Sigi, with the help of maps and a ruler, wrote out and classified all towns in several countries.

There were also holidays spent in Stryy, among surviving members of the Pollak family. 'Their living came from a little factory, though the yard with their house looked to us Viennese children like a farm.'<sup>10</sup>

Yet for all the young Siegfried's happiness, these were not safe times. Austrian society already exhibited signs of anti-Semitic feeling. The Easter celebrations seemed to bring out particular hostility. The children of the Realgymnasium were undoubtedly dragged in. The majority of students were *Ostjuden*, including Pollak. They were the children of recent immigrants from the *shtetl*. Many were Orthodox in their religion. Unlike the more established Jewish families, they had not yet been integrated into liberal Viennese society. They were less assimilated, more visible to their enemies. They experienced the greatest risk.

Another future historian Eric Hobsbawm lived in the same city, before leaving in 1931, when he was fourteen. He was saved from enduring Hitler's entry into Vienna in 1938. Hobsbawm's family belonged to a different class of people, longer settled in the city, more secure and better assimilated than the Pollaks.

The world of the Viennese middle class, and certainly of the Jews who formed so large a proportion of it, was still that of the vast polyglot region whose migrants had, in the past 80 years, turned its capital into a city of two million – except for Berlin by far the largest city on the European continent between Paris and Leningrad. Our relatives had come from, or were still living in, places like Bielitz (now in Poland), Kaschau (now in

Czechoslovakia) or Grosswardein (now in Romania). Our grocers and the porters of our apartment buildings were almost certainly Czech, our servant-girls or child minders not native Viennese: I still remember the tales of werewolves told me by one from Slovenia. My relatives would have shared the passionate indignation of the great art historian Ernst Gombrich, when, to fit in with late twentieth-century fashions, he was asked to describe his native Viennese culture as Jewish. It was plain Viennese middle-class culture, unaffected by the fact that so many of its eminent practitioners were Jews and (faced by the endemic anti-Semitism of the region) knew themselves to be Jews, any more than by the fact that some of them came from Moravia (Freud and Mahler), some from Galicia or the Bukovina (Joseph Roth), or even from the Russe on the Bulgarian Danube (Elias Canetti).

Such integrated Jews looked down on their Eastern cousins as peasants. 'I distinctly remember asking an embarrassed older member of the family', Eric Hobsbawm remembers, 'whether those Eastern Jews had surnames like ours, and if so what names, since they were obviously so different from us.'<sup>11</sup>

Vienna had long possessed a reputation for anti-Semitism. Modern Zionism, the idea that Europe was so endemically racist that Jews had no option but to flee, was invented by a Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl. The first modern politician to secure election on an openly anti-Semitic ticket was Vienna's Christian-Social mayor Karl Lueger. Even in the calmer years of the 1920s, his party retained a major presence in Viennese life. Meanwhile Hitler's victory in Germany in 1933 encouraged similar forces in Austria. President Dollfuss closed down the parliament and Constitutional Court. Opposition newspapers were suppressed. Fearing the rise of an Austrian fascism, the workers of Vienna rose up in spring 1934. Dollfuss sent artillery to pound the housing blocks where the socialists had their base. The victory of this anti-parliamentary right could only mean trouble for Vienna's Jews.

Following the annexation of Austria, the situation became even worse. Jews were forced to scrub the streets. The Pollaks were thrown out of their family flat, and Moses lost his job. Pollard later wrote that racism in Austria had possessed a 'unique populist bite', missing even in Germany. 'While one heard of truckloads of SA men in Germany driving round to

attack Jewish shops and those trading in them, in Vienna there was no need of organised terror: the populace attacked, looted and humiliated without command from above.<sup>12</sup> The *Kristallnacht* pogrom of 9–10 November 1938 indicated further levels of anti-Jewish hostility. The tension must have been unbearable. Moses and Leontine Pollak discussed a range of plans to achieve their own escape, or at least their son's.

One possibility was to seek escape to Britain. Siegfried's cousin John Katz already lived in London. Yet British law was designed to keep out refugees. 'A foreigner could visit the United Kingdom, as teacher or tourist, performer or producer, actor or academic, so long as the visit was temporary and papers were in order.'<sup>13</sup> Specialist schemes, such as the Academic Assistance Council, aided adult refugees from with rare skills, but not 'ordinary people' like the Pollaks or their son. One of the greatest obstacles for the majority was the sheer cost of making the journey. No applicant was likely to receive a visa without already having paid for a reserved passage. Nor was it immediately obvious just how far Nazi racism would go. Between January 1933 and April 1934, just 2000 refugees left Germany for England. By 1938, the numbers fleeing from both Germany and Austria were far higher.

Moses and Leontine tried all sorts of plans to secure the family's departure. Finally, in December 1938, they learned of a breakthrough. 'The British authorities agreed to accept shiploads of minors from Germany—Austria (in part by way of compensation for the immigration clampdown they had imposed in Palestine). The Children's Transports ... saved the lives of nearly 10,000 youngsters, three-quarters of them Jewish.' One historian of this exodus, Daniel Snowman, describes the transports as 'a minor miracle ... major to those lives who were saved by it'.<sup>14</sup> In the middle of winter 1938–9, young Siegfried was sent away to safety. A Jewish committee in Edinburgh raised the necessary bond to pay his passage.

Why did Moses and Leontine Pollak not make more effort to escape with him? One factor may have been Siegfried's ill brother. The parents could not leave him behind, nor could they take him with them. It must have been a terrible decision.<sup>15</sup>

### Learning moderation

From the first camp where he was held, an old, disused Butlin's holiday home in Harwich better designed for summer visitors, Sigi was sent to Whittingehame Farm School, which was located

on the Balfour family estates near Edinburgh. The organisers had designed it to prepare young men and women for life on a Kibbutz, and the curriculum, such as it was, contained considerable elements of manual work, including cleaning, cooking and labouring in the fields. Class work was perfunctory. The scheme was funded by voluntary contributions, from local Jewish families. In his later, private correspondence, Sidney Pollard suggested that the lack of any formal syllabus may have had its roots in the school's pressing, financial needs:

Technically, the regulations were that children could be brought out from Hitler's Germany to the UK, as soon as enough money had been collected to keep each child for two years, which was reckoned to be £100, so that £100 saved one life. Committees were formed to raise the money *inter alia* an Edinburgh Committee, which provided the money for us 180. However, £1 a week might have been ok when added to a family income, but not enough to keep a child, plus supervisory personnel as we had at Whittingehame, hence the cheap labour on the farms of Lord Traprain, heir to the Balfours and in charge of the estate.<sup>16</sup>

We do not have any trace of Siegfried's letters that he sent to his parents at this time. Yet we can detect traces of his correspondence in the letters that Siegfried's parents sent back to him. One communication to Siegfried was sent from Vienna in March 1939. Moses Pollak urged patience on his son.

My dear Sigi

Got your dear letter of 2 and 3rd, and am replying as follows: above all I wish you from the bottom of my heart that God preserves you and helps you find happiness.

Your expression that it is an important stage in your life is an exaggeration, a child of only 14 cannot yet have a stage of life, at 14 everything is still fresh and in development. In fact it has been an advantage that you haven't been here in the last 8–14 days, as it would have been harder to make the journey to Whittingehame...

Some of the sentences read as if the young man had criticised conditions in the camp. Moses Pollak attempted to reassure his son, 'approach it without prejudice, but with love ... with a

desire to work and a will'. Sigi should tell himself, 'First, I'm doing this for myself, because everything I do to succeed helps me and us Jews, second, it is only temporary, and third, you should always have hope in your endeavours. The situation won't last for ever.'<sup>17</sup> Despite these words of encouragement, the times were bleak. The letters soon dried up. Siegfried would not see his parents again, nor did he ever discover what happened to them.

The recent release of documents enables us to confirm events whose details young Pollak never knew. Moses and Leontine Pollak were deported from Vienna to the camp at Opole in February and June 1941, where they died.<sup>18</sup>

Siegfried Pollak was part of a large movement of people. Some 50,000 Jewish men and women arrived in Britain between 1933–9.<sup>19</sup> Although they were exiles from Nazi Austria and Germany, their time in Britain was not easy. There was widespread suspicion shown towards these foreigners. Indigenous racist organisations, including the British Union of Fascists, regarded the refugees with hate. In conditions of war, the British government interned all enemy aliens, locking up known fascists and committed anti-Nazis alike. Even at those moments when the state was friendly, or in those places where indigenous racist traditions were marginal, still Britain could be a cold and hostile place. Daniel Snowman records some of the earliest anxieties described by different Central European refugees. 'Everything was disconcerting. Not only the language, which everybody spoke so quickly, but the light switches that had to be flicked up and down instead of turned, the bulbs that did not screw but had to be clicked into place, the traffic that drove on the wrong side of the street, the top-heavy double-decker buses.'

Language provided a particular barrier to young people eager to explore their new home. As well as learning grammar and vocabulary, they also had to learn the particular linguistic culture of the English. The child refugees came from a culture that praised wild humour, vivid stories and strong expression. This strange society thrived rather on under-expression. Refugees were often cold-shouldered by their classmates as 'swanks' or show-offs. It was better to deny displeasure (by employing a double negative), than to affirm happiness.

The Polish-born nuclear physicist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Joseph Rotblat came to Liverpool University on a one-year Fellowship in the late 1930s to