

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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INTERVIEW: 150

NAME: JOHN GRENVILLE

DATE: 19 MARCH 2007

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 7 seconds

BL: Today is the 19th of March 2007. We are conducting an interview with Professor John Grenville. We are in London at the Leo Baeck institute and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

BL: Can you please tell me your name?

JG: John Grenville.

BL: And where were you born?

JG: Berlin.

BL: And when were you born?

JG: On the 11th of January, 1928.

BL: And how old are you today?

JG: 79.

BL: Professor Grenville, thank you very much for having agreed to do this interview for Refugee Voices.

JG: Pleasure.

BL: Can you please tell us something about your family background?

JG: Yes, we lived in Berlin certainly since the middle of the 19th century. On my mother's side, the Mich {[?]} family, I think lived in Berlin even longer. I still have some heirlooms, of the 1840s, serviettes and things. On my father's side, they probably came to Berlin a little later, but also certainly by the mid-19th century. So we're an old Berlin family.

BL: Where did they come from? Do you know?

JG: I don't. I think one side of the family came from Silesia – and the other side I don't know.

BL: Tell us something about your grandparents?

JG: Yes, this is my grandparents I'm talking about.

BL: Yes, and once they came to Berlin, what did they do?

JG: On the paternal side, my grandfather died when I was a child, but he was a lawyer as was my father on the maternal side. He was a rather interesting lawyer. I think he married my grandmother who had a lot of money – that was the Bich [?] family. I don't think he had much money. And because they had money he wasn't dependent on the income as a lawyer so he became known as the Gypsy lawyer. He defended all the Gypsies. He loved horses and defended the Gypsies... and people who were poor and couldn't pay, which is how we got our parrot – from a sailor who couldn't pay. So he gave him a parrot as payment.

BL: What was his name? – Not the parrot, your grandfather!

Tape 1: 2 minutes 55 seconds

JG: The parrot was called Laure and my grandfather was called Gustav Sandberg and the Gypsies were tremendously loyal to us. During the 1930s, whenever they came through Berlin, there was always a basket of food outside our door. We knew it came from the Gypsies.

BL: What sort of cases was he involved in? Were they accused of stealing or – what sort of...?

JG: They were usually – they were horse traders – and they were accused of filing the teeth of the horses to a point to make them appear younger. He also was the lawyer in Berlin for the Bäcker, the Bäcker's Union – so they would be the...how would you translate?

BL: The bakers?

JG: The bakers, yes, the union of bakers. And they too remained loyal during the 30s. My brother would be sent to a particular baker in Berlin and he would knock on the door and he would say: 'I'm coming from Justizrat Sandberg.' and he would be given a large basket of cake...bread. That also happened all through the 30s. So there were loyalties which persisted, I remember that.

BL: Which area of Berlin did you grow up in?

JG: First of all in the Uhlandstrasse, Ecke Kurfürstendamm, which was a sort of noble sort of area and then, when my father was forced out of his law position, we moved to the Hohenzollerndamm in Wilmersdorf.

BL: Tell us what did your father do?

JG: He was a Landgerichtsdirektor in Berlin. At quite a young age - so I think he had quite a good career in front of him. He was only about 42 when he became a Landgerichtsdirektor.

BL: And tell us a bit about your mother?

JG: Well, I lost my mother fairly young. She was unable to leave Germany and so she became a victim in 1942. She was a very educated person, very good at languages – had studied for her degree at a German university, but spent her life looking after the family.

BL: And what sort of school did you go to?

Tape 1: 5 minutes 19 seconds

JG: An ordinary elementary school in Berlin. By then we were in the Hohenzollerndamm so I went to the school just across the Hohenzollerndamm, which was Salzburgerstrasse and I remember the policeman who saw me across... every day. He was given a box of cigars by my father at Christmas. Life was very normal at school up till 1938. I felt no anti-Semitism or prejudice by the teachers. I was just normally treated.

BL: Yes, school - you were saying it was a normal atmosphere in the '30s?

JG: Yes, entirely. The elementary school I went to from 1934 to '38 had a completely normal...

BL: Were there many Jewish children or...?

JG: Some – not many. In my class I think there was one other Jewish boy, but relationships were completely relaxed.

BL: What religious orientation did your family have?

JG: My mother was religious to the point that we would go to synagogue for high festivals and occasionally the Reform-Gemeinde on a Sunday. My father, I think, was an agnostic but he never expressed any religious views to us. He just didn't go to the synagogue.

BL: Which synagogue did you go to?

JG: I think Fasanenstrasse which wasn't too far away.

BL: But you said you didn't go – you said - on a Sunday? Not on a Sunday? On Shabbat?

JG: I'm not sure that the Reform-Gemeinde...

BL: Did they do it on a Sunday?

JG: I think so. I mean my memory may be wrong, but I think it was on a Sunday. The Berlin Reform-Gemeinde was very... acclimatised to Germany. I think it was on a Sunday. It's something you could check on.

BL: Yes. Do you remember these occasions? Can you describe any of the services or any...?

Tape 1: 7 minutes 33 seconds

JG: Yes, vaguely. The Rabbiner – the rabbis were very charismatic in the Reform-Gemeinde. And these were services you could follow, although you didn't know any Hebrew – they were all in German. And the music was very nice so they were nice services. I do remember them vaguely. I was only eight, nine, ten.

BL: Do you remember the name of the rabbis or anyone?

JG: I think one was called Prinz, Joachim Prinz, who was very well known. Rosenthal or Rosenbaum was another. A third one was called Gottschalk – so they did make an impression. Those were the three I remember.

BL: Did you go to any youth clubs? You were still very young but...

JG: Eventually I went to a Sportverein – the Maccabees – because that was the one Turnverein you could go to...as a Jewish child.

BL: And what sort of circles did your parents mix with?

JG: I think there was in the home no social contact with non-Jews - so close friends and relatives. They were all Jewish, but not religiously Jewish, rather like my father – either agnostic or...or the three-day-holiday Jews.

BL: Yes. And what sort of friends did you have? Do you remember anyone in particular?

JG: Yes - not many. I played in the street with whoever was in the street as we all did on the pavement. I particularly liked, I remember, playing with girls, which was odd. I had a friend who lived on the floor below us called Goetz and he was a so-called half-Jew. His father had married a Christian. I don't remember many friends I must say.

BL: And how different was it when you changed school, when you went to the Gymnasium?

Tape 1: 10 minutes 0 second

JG: That was more Nazi. That was more prominent, the Nazi influence, but of course it was now the spring of 1938. My mother went round all the Gymnasien to try

and find me a place in a German Gymnasium. She didn't want me to go to a Jewish school. And so I had to go all the way to the Spittelmarkt from Wilmersdorf – which was a long way on the U-Bahn. The school itself - my form master was a Herr Abel who had the Parteizeichen in his lapel, but he was correct. I wasn't put on a separate bench or anything, nor was I marked out in any way in the school grounds. So he was perfectly correct, cold and correct, but he didn't treat me any differently to the other boys. The only thing is there were certain things I couldn't join, which I noticed. Well, obviously, I couldn't join the Hitler Youth. But I also couldn't join the Chess Club, which was rather sad, you know. Chess was not a game for Jews. But, once I left the school grounds, I do remember I had many friends from the class who accompanied me home or some of the way. I didn't feel in any way unhappy in the school.

And almost on the last day –it must have been just before the November pogrom - I couldn't attend the Rassen class, the Rassenkunde, I was sent somewhere else. And just before the class began I climbed on the desk in my class and said: 'Look at this book and look at me. It's all absolute rubbish!' And the whole class was in uproar – you know, clapped and Herr Abel came in and I think that may have had something to do with my expulsion soon after. But I'm not sure because everybody was expelled anyway. But some children, some children continued in the German schools after November and I had to go on that very day, on November the 9th, and I think Herr Abel had reported me for making anti-Nazi remarks.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 31 seconds

BL: What is your memory of Kristallnacht?

JG: I remember walking back – it must be November the 10th or 9th – 9th or 10th that I left the school. I remember walking down the street and seeing the shattered shops and the owners - the Jewish owners - clearing up the glass in front. And people standing around in silence, not saying anything. Complete silence. Nobody said anything. Kristallnacht itself was a quite traumatic experience because that afternoon the Gestapo called for my father, who was taken to a concentration camp, and my mother and her three children – my two brothers - were left alone. And I remember how my mother – I remember sitting on my mother's knee in the evening – odd memory – and she was talking to my grandmother, that she'd gone to the Alexanderplatz to the Gestapo headquarters to find out where my father was. The women were extraordinarily courageous on the Kristallnacht. And then that night we heard flats being broken into in the early evening and my mother thought it wasn't safe in our flat and we all went to Bahnhof Zoo and sat in the waiting room. Then, around midnight, my mother thought – some people went on slow trains – my mother thought, well, this was no good. We came back to the flat and I remember hearing the glass being broken all around and I was quite frightened. I was eleven at the time – just eleven. But by the morning, things were back to normal more or less, except my father wasn't there.

BL: Did you know what had happened to your father?

JG: Oh yes. I knew he'd been taken to a concentration camp. And, eventually, we got a message from him – from Oranienburg I think it was - on the outskirts of Berlin.

And then... he was in that camp, I think, about ten or twelve weeks. And I remember looking out of the window and suddenly I saw him crossing the road toward the house – towards the flat, the apartment house – and looking terrible, badly wounded on his hand, quite transformed. That was a shock you know – one's father was always the person one regarded as one was completely secure as long as one's father was there, and I realised that he couldn't protect himself or protect us.

Tape 1: 15 minutes 33 seconds

BL: How long was he kept? After how long did he come back?

JG: I think about ten to twelve weeks.

BL: So quite a long time.

JG: Yeah. Before he was released.

BL: And did he talk about what happened to him?

JG: No. He said nothing. He was probably afraid to because they'd all been threatened, hadn't they?, upon leaving.

BL: And when was the first time emigration was discussed – or was it ever discussed?

JG: Then. Then. And I remember sitting in the kitchen with my father and mother discussing that they should register us for the Kindertransport and I was very keen to go and they decided to do that.

BL: Emigration.

JG: Right.

BL: You said your parents were discussing it. You were keen to go.

JG: Yes.

BL: What about your brothers?

JG: I don't know.

BL: Were they older or younger?

JG: Older. We...we...we all went together on the same Kindertransport.

BL: So were you told you were going or...?

JG: Yes. I didn't know too much about it.

BL: So what happened between Kristallnacht and the Kindertransport? What happened in that time?

JG: I went to a Jewish school, which was quite different in style to the German one. They were very relaxed and friendly. And the talk was all about: 'Has your father come back from the concentration camp?' – or whose parent has come back. And people would say: 'Well my father came back yesterday.' The teachers would be very sympathetic. I can't remember what I learned.

BL: Was it a relief to go to a Jewish school after your experiences in the Gymnasium?

JG: It was in a way. I'd never been used to a relaxed school. I mean all the German schools were un-relaxed and very disciplinarian. And this was totally un-disciplinarian. One no longer had to be frightened of the teacher. That was a constant impression I had. I mean the teachers would cane boys in front of the class and things like that - not viciously – it was just part of the pattern of discipline. But that created a totally different atmosphere between the boys and the teacher. And that didn't exist in the Jewish schools.

Tape 1: 18 minutes 18 seconds

BL: And did they prepare you for emigration in any way? Were there special subjects - English or...?

JG: No...no. Well, I was learning English, actually, at the German school – in the Gymnasium. I still remember the book I had in front of me. On the cover were the Houses of Parliament, which was rather incongruous for Nazi Germany.

BL: But the subjects were the same in the Jewish school apart from that?

JG: Yes. Yes. And the one I was in wasn't particularly orthodox. I think it must have been something founded by the Reform-Gemeinde.

BL: Do you remember the name of the school or where it was?

JG: Possibly it was the Josef Lehmann Schule, but I wouldn't swear to that. I think it was – jogging my memory.

BL: And when did you find out that you had a place on the Kindertransport?

JG: I can't remember. I think we just... one day I went into a taxi with my mother to the station and that was it.

BL: But you said you were...with your brothers you were all together?

JG: Yes, but only one parent was allowed to come to the station. It was another little Nazi thing. And we sat in the waiting room. Our names were called by the people organising it at the German end. Gestapo everywhere. And you just went. You

were escorted to the train and you got onto the train. And then the train went off. That was it.

BL: Do you remember what you packed – what you took?

JG: Yes. We were allowed one regulation suitcase. And I was quite a promising violin player. I had a very good violin teacher in Berlin, who I think played for the Berlin Philharmonic before – Fraulein Furst. She had quite a number of Jewish boys and girls. And I think I was quite promising and I loved my violin. But I wasn't allowed to take it with me, and I was very sad about that. But what my mother did was to pack violin music in my suitcase, hoping when I got to England somebody would realise and give me a violin, which they did. When I got to England I was given a violin, but I had no more lessons, so that really was the end of my career as a violinist. I think I would have been quite good.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 55 seconds

BL: So on the day, can you describe the journey or what you can remember?

JG: I have one very sad memory. As I slipped off my mother's lap I noticed a tear falling from her eye. She never – she never expressed any sadness so as not to make us unhappy. I remember that. And then the journey itself was just an adventure. We got to Holland – went through Holland – went to Hoek van Holland, on to the boat, and I was horrified when they served tea out of large urns because the tea had milk in it, which I'd never had before. So I thought that was a bad beginning - tea with milk. And then I got... in the morning on the ship we were all assembled on the boat. We had to see a doctor who checked us quickly. I think those doctors who checked the children on the boat were highly sympathetic. There were a lot of children who they shouldn't have...I know my brother probably already had the beginnings of tuberculosis. And I noticed the doctor hesitating when he heard him – and just let him through. So the doctors went out of their way not to reject anybody. But I was taken apart from my brothers – I didn't know what happened to them – on to the railway station at Harwich, where I was met by a very gaunt gentleman, who turned out to be the headmaster of this preparatory school in an old car. He didn't speak a word of German and I didn't speak a word of English. It was all done by motion. And half an hour later I was in school, dressed in school uniform, like the other boys, totally disoriented. And I was very homesick for a while. But I soon got under the way of the school. I noticed the huge difference between the English schoolchildren and German schoolchildren. The English school children were all very kind. They'd been told who we were - there were about 3 children who arrived in the school, and they helped us all they could. Whereas in Germany you would have expected, if you were different in any way, you would have been bothered or discriminated against. In the English school it was the opposite; you were helped.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 36 seconds

BL: Who had arranged the school for you?

JG: That's a mystery. Somebody came forward and paid for that prep school. And I asked the headmaster who it was and he said, 'No', she wished to remain anonymous. I could never discover it, who she was.

BL: A woman?

JG: A lady yes. And he said he sent her the school reports every term and she was very interested in my progress. And, when I was 13, it was arranged that I should go into Lancing, I think it was – a public school – who were prepared to give me a scholarship. Probably I wouldn't have had, the lady wouldn't have had to pay the full fees. But it was not to be, because the committee which was in charge of me said no. I was not to have that kind of education.

BL: The Refugee Committee?

JG: Yes. And they apprenticed me to a tailor in Leeds at thirteen. And my father intervened and said that he didn't want that. But he was working in Croydon in a war factory, which was heavily bombed.

BL: Tell us, when did your father come to England?

JG: A little later, in the summer.

BL: How did he manage to come here?

JG: Well, by being in a concentration camp he had... it was easier to get a visa and his sister in America managed to get a visa for the States and so my father had a transit visa for the UK – for England. But to get back to the schooling side, they said: 'Well if you won't allow it you'll have to look after him', which he couldn't, because he was in Croydon, working in a factory. In the end he agreed to pay for me in the hostel out of his meagre income and they compromised. I could go to this technical school to learn a trade. So I lived in a hostel, which was well run by the committee, had a nice warden. That was all pretty good. And off I went to the technical school.

BL: Where was the hostel?

Tape 1: 25 minutes 57 seconds

JG: In Cambridge - in Parkside. When I got to the technical school they asked me what I would like to do and I sort of looked at what the opportunities were and found there was an art school. So I said: 'I would like to go to the art school'. I had visions of maybe nature studies. Maybe there would be a few girls there. But, anyway, I thought this was not bad, you know. It was quite a good way of being educated. And I was very happy in the art school for two weeks until a horrified committee heard what I'd chosen and said: 'No, no' – said no to the art school. And I was transferred to the building department and I was there for two years. I'm quite good at the theoretical side of things, but not very good at the practical. My plumbing wasn't up to scratch nor my woodwork. And I then made up my mind: I wanted to have an academic education. And I wrote to the headmaster of the first school, which was the best school in Birmingham, and explained my plight, how I was stuck here in the building

department and wanted to take O-Levels – or GCSE today. And the headmaster came to the hostel to interview me, which was extraordinary. And he said: ‘Of course you can come to my school.’

BL: You’d found that school by yourself?

JG: Yeah. ‘Yes, you can come to my school’, he said – ‘No fees, you know.’... When the committee heard of it they said: ‘No’. So then I was stuck again.

BL: Hold on, was the committee – were they your legal guardians? How come they could make these decisions?

JG: They acted on behalf of the legal guardians. There were these children’s refugee committees and that was the one in Cambridge and that’s how they acted. And, as I explained, the one in Birmingham was quite different.

BL: Who were your guardians? You said before...?

JG: Half the Rothschild’s and half the committee in Portsmouth, who’d collected money between them. So there I...then I was a bit stuck not knowing quite how I was going to get this O-Level. And there was an organisation called a correspondence college in Cambridge, a university correspondence college. And I got their syllabus, you know their folder, and it said on the back they gave scholarships. So I applied for one and was interviewed by the head of it. He said, no they’d never given a scholarship, in fact. It was all very odd. But he said: ‘You can have one.’ So I then was very happy. I had this correspondence course for O-level, began working on it, and proudly told the committee, which was a foolish thing to do. So then, what happened next was that the committee wrote to the headmaster of the technical school and said they were to stop me doing this. And the headmaster called me in and said I was breaking the school rules. I wasn’t allowed to take courses other than ones given by the school and, by this time, I was so mad I was breathing defiance. And I said to the headmaster: ‘Well the best thing you could do is to expel me. And I can do this on my own.’ And I still remember this headmaster’s reply. He said: ‘Keep your shirt on.’ And after that he helped me. He got teachers to teach me, help me with the correspondence. So when the other boys were doing woodwork I was doing maths. And so I did my, what was then called the Matriculation of London University. Passed it.

BL: How do you explain the Refugee Committee’s decision or the interest to...?

JG: They were acting on central instructions from London of Bloomsbury House. And some committees – like I understand the Birmingham one – simply defied them, and did what was best for the children. And others acted for them. The person in charge of the Cambridge Committee, a Miss Penman, was their paid employee. They had to do what they were told.

BL: So which...the instruction was...?

JG: That the children were not to have an academic education.

BL: But a vocational training?

JG: A vocational training – yeah. So, anyway, I sidestepped that and got my Matric. And I wanted to be a scientist and I found a job in a laboratory – as a laboratory assistant - outside Cambridge. I began studying chemistry and physics.

BL: Which year was that?

Tape 1: 31 minutes 9 seconds

JG: Well this would have been about 1942 or '43. But the laboratory was a very unhealthy place, and, one day, the doctor came to the hostel and saw me and my hair had turned green. I must have looked quite sick. And he said I had to leave the laboratory straight away. I think he saved me because the person who was in charge of me, they found this. This was a laboratory making pesticides...[phone ringing] This was a laboratory making pesticides and they weren't careful with their pesticides and she was poisoned and paralysed. So I got out just in time. But the committee saw me in this state with the green hair and so on and didn't... of course the doctor had stopped me. So by then I'd got a bit fed up with science anyway, so I said I wanted to do something else. I would study history, I decided. And I had to find a job. And I always loved gardening. So there were lots of gardens in the colleges so I went around the colleges and found myself a job at Peterhouse and became a gardener.

BL: Where did you live?

JG: In the hostel - by then I think I was living in lodgings. Yeah at first in the hostel and, when I was sixteen or sixteen and a half, in lodgings. So I was a gardener.

BL: And were you in touch with your father and your brothers during that time?

JG: By mail - not physically. So then, as a gardener, one day I said I wanted to do the intermediate London University Exam – Intermediate BA it was called – which was kind of A-Level plus. I had to do it in History, and Latin, and economics and I think German. And I asked to use the library at Peterhouse. No gardener had ever asked to use the library – the bursar was aghast. But it got around the High Table that this gardener was reading history books. And a student – the London School of Economics was evacuated to Peterhouse - and one of the students started teaching me, somebody had made the contact, and tutoring me and I was writing essays. And I know one or two essays were passed around the High Table. They weren't too bad. And then, when I passed my Intermediate Exam, I decided it was time to go to university.

Tape 1: 34 minutes 14 seconds

Oh yes, what I'd left out was that I was permitted to use the library by Peterhouse on condition that I did not attempt to enter the University of Cambridge. I gave that undertaking. So then my thoughts turned to Birkbeck College where I could do it in the evening. And I was asked for an interview at Birkbeck College. But I also had responsibilities for the Master's garden and his greenhouse. If I went to the college, his grapes would freeze. So I wrote to the college and said: I'm sorry I couldn't make the time because the grapes would freeze because I was responsible for the

greenhouse. So they said: 'Well tell us a time when you can come', which I did. So I was accepted at Birkbeck College and I duly went to see the bursar and gave him my notice. And I still remember what he said. He said: 'You really need to think about this very carefully because we've had our eye on you. You have the makings of a head porter.' So I described this in an account I've written that I thought this was the crossroads of my career. Was I going to be a porter? Head porters were important people in colleges. They wore top hats and things, or was I going to become a student at university? I had no hesitation in becoming a student.

BL: But, during that time, were you sort of completely on your own?

JG: Yeah.

BL: That was quite remarkable for such a young boy -

JG: Yeah, well I was...

BL: - to make all these decisions?

JG: Well, I wasn't in any doubt about the direction I was going. I'd also had a part-time job on Saturday. Peterhouse never paid me enough money so I had to take a job on Saturday afternoon. And I saw an advertisement by a Cambridge professor that he was looking for a gardener. And I applied and it turned out to be Professor Lauterpacht, a very famous international lawyer. And I started gardening and he started talking to me and found out what my ambitions were. So every time I appeared on Saturday I would start gardening for 5 minutes and he said: 'Well that's enough now.' And he would tutor me for an hour and then insist on paying me for the gardening. So that was very good. I had very good tutoring really, so it wasn't surprising that I did well in the Intermediate and got into Birkbeck College.

Tape 1: 37 minutes 0 second

BL: Did you have contact with other refugees – children, youngsters, or any other...?

JG: Well no, not really. Only the people in the hostel.

BL: It was the wartime. How did the war affect you?

JG: In Cambridge, not very much.

BL: Obviously you were too young... You were not interned, were you?

JG: Well, one heard the planes go overhead and... I didn't think too much about the war.

BL: Was your father interned?

JG: Yes, for a while, in 1940, but then, as I said, he became a factory worker in Croydon, making bombs.

BL: How did he come to be a factory worker?

JG: He applied for the job... and got it.

BL: And how did he deal with this change in profession, radical change? [Slight interruption]

JG: No, he remained exactly the same person, didn't change. I noticed no change in him.

BL: Was he bitter? Was he...?

JG: No, just got on with life.

BL: That's quite remarkable.

JG: Yes, we got together after...after the war I left Croydon and we lived together in a lodging house for a while whilst I was at University. And no...he expressed... in a way, he expressed no feelings.

BL: What happened to your...Can you tell us what happened to your mother?

JG: Well, she perished. The last message we had – my father had - from her was in 1942 through the Red Cross. No he was very stoic. It was quite remarkable. And got his pension very late - in the mid-'50s – before they paid him his pension as a judge. And then he was the judge again... back as he was before. He had an offer back in '45 for a very senior judicial position back in Germany. The Control Commission approached him: would he go back? And he said, 'No', it would obviously affect the work.

BL: How old was he when he emigrated?

Tape 1: 39 minutes 44 seconds

JG: Fifty... So where were we? I was in London and I had to get a job because Birkbeck College was in the evening. So, at that point, I went to Gabbitas & Thring. Have you ever heard of them? Gabbitas & Thring are in Bond Street and Gabbitas & Thring are an agency for hiring teachers for private schools. And, as by then I was quite good at maths and Latin, I offered my services as a school teacher without any qualifications other than my Intermediate BA. And I got a job in Kensington in a private school and finished up teaching the top class Latin, quite successfully 'cause one of the boys finished up getting a scholarship to Westminster in Latin. That was a fluke actually; to be honest, because there was a book of Latin passages which we struggled together to translate. And he was a very clever boy. And there was a passage from Cicero in this book. And somehow we managed to translate it. And when he went for his scholarship examination at Westminster School he got the same passage in English. He remembered the Latin and wrote beautiful Ciceronian Latin and got a Classics scholarship. Anyway, that was a school which didn't treat me very

well and paid me very badly. And I was there I think for about 18 months. And then I got a scholarship to the LSE.

BL: And where did you live when you came to London, with your father or...?

JG: With my father and then with friends; we shared a flat. And once I was at LSE the rest of my life was all downhill!

BL: But you managed to get through this very difficult time?

JG: Yeah, and after that I had three years full time University education. It was just heaven.

BL: Reading history?

Tape 1: 42 minutes 12 seconds

JG: Reading history and...

BL: What particular area were you drawn to?

JG: Diplomatic history. International Relations, and then got a scholarship to do a PhD. And two years into my PhD I got a job as assistant Lecturer at Nottingham University and I finished my PhD there.

BL: What was the topic of your PhD?

JG: It was on British Foreign Policy from...during the Boer War.

BL: The Second War?

JG: The Boer War...

BL: Oh, the Boer War! Sorry, I thought...the World War...no Boer War – 1900 – yes.

JG: And I got a prize for that from the University of London. And I got this lectureship. And then, after I'd been a lecturer there for about seven years, I got an offer which was extraordinary, which was a professorship at the University of Rangoon, Burma. And my very paternalistic professor in Nottingham, bless him, said 'No, no, you can't possibly go to Burma. This is madness!' And he said: 'I'll tell you what. You can go to the United States for a year. We'll give you a leave of absence.' And I thought, Ah - that was a good deal because by then I was looking for a wife, and I was singularly unsuccessful with English girls. I don't know why. I mean I courted several without any success at all. And I thought, well maybe in the States, and I did want to find a Jewish girl. There was something... The Jewish girls I met...it just wasn't possible. So I decided that I would go and apply for a fellowship. And the fellowship I chose was called the Commonwealth Fund Fellowship - Harkness Fellowship - which was a very fine fellowship to go for. And I asked Professor Webster for a reference and he said: 'Oh,' he said, 'I'll give you a reference,

but it's the wrong fellowship to go for because this is intended for English people – Presidents of the Oxford Union, people like that.'

Tape 1: 44 minutes 44 seconds

I said: 'Well that's the very reason I chose it, because I want to be recognised as English.' I was very English in those days. He said: 'Well I doubt whether you'll get it.' Anyway, in due course I applied for it and I remember they were rather horrified when I put in my birth certificate with swastikas on it. And I was short listed and I was interviewed... and I knew the question would come. You know, the interviewers were the British Ambassador to the United States, the Editor of the Economist – really elite people. And I knew the question would come. The question was: 'Well we've got very fine references for you. Your academic record is very good. But we are a bit puzzled. You know this fellowship is to show English people in the United States - and how can you see yourself as such?' And I had my answer ready and I said: 'Well it's important to explain to Americans that generations of people have come to England and become English and not just Americans – not just to America and become Americans.' I don't think they were convinced, but they thought the answer was good and they gave me the fellowship.

So off I went to Yale and had a wonderful time there for a year. And, when I was asked what I wanted to do, I said I wanted to research military...the impact on the military of diplomats and diplomatic relations. It was a good subject which in those days nobody had thought of. But my real purpose was to find a wife. So I spent half my time researching military-civil relations, and the other half sort of researching sex and women and so on. And I found a wonderful girl in New York whom I married. We didn't know each other very long, but I married Betty Ann and she came to England and we had a very good marriage, produced three boys. So then I came back to England. And the American research led to a book I wrote for the Yale University Press. And then I got offers of American Professorships as a result of the book, but I stayed in England and got the Chair, the Professorship at Leeds.

Tape 1: 47 minutes 29 seconds

BL: Why did you want to stay in England?

JG: I don't know. That's a very good question. I just...didn't want to leave England. And Betty Ann agreed to come to England with me, so it was no problem.

BL: By then, were you naturalised?

JG: Yes, that's '48 yeah...

BL: So did you see yourself as British at the time or was it...?

JG: Yes, that was a gradual change in my outlook. I wanted to be English and gradually changed about being happy to be British and not English.

BL: At the time you wanted to be English?

JG: Yeah. At the time I wanted to be English. But a few years on I didn't want to be English any more. All this business - class consciousness and all that - I didn't go for and...I used to tell my colleagues 'Thank god I'm not English.' And they'd look at me and I said: 'Well, I'm British, but I'm not English.'

BL: Do you remember when you were naturalised, when you actually received the papers?

JG: Well I was...my father was naturalised in '48 so I was naturalised as a minor, on his papers.

BL: At the time you were still in Cambridge?

JG: By then I was...by then I must have been...Yes by then I was at that prep school, teaching, '48. So, gradually, I think this is the best country to live in. What I find about Britain is that they're as prejudiced as anybody - you know there are terrible...all these prejudices and views about foreigners. But there is a degree of fair-mindedness which supervenes. For instance, when I applied for the lectureship at Nottingham, the Professor there, A.C. Wood, was a First World War veteran. And after my appointment he said: 'You know, I thought I'd never live to see the day that we'd appoint a Prussian.' Then he got over that. About two or three years later, he wanted me to marry his daughter, who was a very plain looking girl. I wasn't interested in her at all. No, before he wanted me to marry his daughter he called me into his room once and he said: 'Once a year you know the University joins the church service in Nottingham - we go with the city and we have an annual service, and I've noticed you haven't come to the church service. It would be nice if you came.' So I said: 'Well, I can't come because I'm Jewish.' And I think that was even worse than being Prussian. Then, three years later, he wanted me to marry his daughter. So I think this was all very typically British, the prejudice which is overcome by personal relations.

Tape 1: 50 minutes 43 seconds

BL: Did you experience a lot of let's say anti-German or anti-Jewish sentiments?

JG: In a generalised way anti-Jewish sentiments, yes. I remember talking to an accountant about my father's...my father needed an accountant once he got the German compensation, to sort out what tax he should pay and what would be free of tax. And the accountant sort of asked about my father and one thing and another and...what terrible things had happened. But then, this was after the war, he said: 'Well of course you mustn't forget it's your people who killed Christ.' That was after the war. But he did my father's accounts extremely well. So there was this generalised anti-Semitism. There was very little of it in the University, practically nothing. In fact, I would say no anti-Semitism in any of the universities I've been in.

BL: When you came to London, did you have contact with any Jewish organisations or synagogues? Or did you look for that sort of thing?

JG: No. I neither looked for it nor had any. It's only since I married my Catholic wife...She paid...We pay out of our money a certain amount to the church. And I

thought, well, we can't pay money to the church and nothing to the synagogue. This is overdoing it. So I joined this synagogue in Birmingham and we pay equal amounts now to the church and the synagogue. And that is about the extent of my affiliation. And I retired. I'm still very busy writing, teaching – I'm back at the University teaching part time.

BL: What is your most important contribution in terms of your own research?

Tape 1: 52 minutes 46 seconds

JG: Well they've all been different. I've never repeated anything I've done before. So I did a book on British Foreign Policy. It's a standard work. The film work was very innovative.

BL: Yes, you haven't told us about your film work. Can you briefly tell us?

JG: Well, I decided when I was at Leeds one day that...wouldn't it be nice if when I'm lecturing about Nazi Germany I could get film, say of a Nuremberg rally, and maybe stick two or three films together and show them to the students. And a lecturer in the department, Nicholas Prone, had at one point worked for Grierson, who was at one point a famous name in television. And he was a medievalist – Nicholas. And I told him this idea and he said he would help me, you know, quite a good idea. Then I discovered, well, you couldn't just stick two or three pieces of film together – it wasn't quite as simple as that. In the end, we made a documentary called 'The Munich Crisis', which had a lot of innovative film techniques in it because we had no money, so we were forced to innovate. And also at that time all the documentaries on television were made by television people and historians were just names on the list. But they didn't decide what went in it. And we thought, if it was going to be serious history, the historian had to be in charge. So we made the first film and it was very successful, bought by many universities and shown by TV. Then we made a second film called 'End of Illusions'. There was an educational thinking behind it, that students needed to be taught how to be critical of this new medium – how to be able not to be overwhelmed by it but to take a critical view of it.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 4 seconds

So we made two documentaries. In order to get the money for them I formed an association of University History Departments called the British University Film Consortium. And we anchored it at Leeds financially. And it's been a very successful enterprise making many films since. It was a non-profit venture as far as I was concerned. All the profits went...came to the business, which the University of Leeds were in charge of – the finances. But it led to us both being hired by the BBC to make a series which we did. And then one day, a producer from ZDF called Dieter Franck came to London. He was going to make a film series on the 1930s. And he wanted...he wanted an English historian, because he wanted to be able to sell this film internationally. And he thought with a German historian it would never do well internationally. So, he told me this story, he went to Foyle's to look at various books and he found this English historian, Grenville, and he wrote to me and said could he come and see me? And he came to see me and he then discovered, a) that I made films, which was extraordinary, and secondly that I was fluent in German as well. So we were a perfect match and he invited me over to Mainz where ZDF is. And when I

went over there... Oh he didn't know I made films...and he put me in a room and left for about half an hour, and I saw all this film stuff on the editor and I started looking at it. Began sort of...He said: 'What are you doing?' I said: 'Well, I was just looking at these...' He realised then I'd made films as well. And it became a very close partnership and we made, I think, 30 documentaries together, shown internationally to millions of people. They sold all over the place.

BL: We have to stop here because the tape is running out.

Tape 1: 57 minutes 35 seconds

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minutes 8 seconds

BL: This is Tape Two. We are conducting an interview with Professor John Grenville. Talking about your own research, can you tell us why you were drawn to British history at the beginning and maybe what happened to your current research and what you are researching at the moment?

JG: I think it was all part of the psychological makeup of wanting to escape from Germany and the German past and anything to do with Germany. So my first book was on a most English Prime Minister – the third Marquis of Salisbury and his foreign policy. And my second book was on the United States Navy... and in between I wrote a book on European exploration. So I did everything except German history. I avoided German history, I think, psychologically. And it wasn't until 1980 that I decided that because I had the skill in German to be able to read it fast and I was reading German academic works on Nazi Germany and Jewish persecution, which were absolutely unreadable. And I thought it was almost a duty to combine the English method of history, which is to write interesting history for the general public, with my ability to do research in German. And I felt it almost a duty to do this – to explain Nazi Germany, to explain Jewish-German relations. I didn't intend to spend as long on that as I have. In fact it's taken me over 20 years researching this. I happen to have a guest professorship in Hamburg, so I started looking at archives in Hamburg, which are fantastically good. And this has taken me then into this whole area and, through the Hamburg connection, I made a connection with the Leo Baeck Institute and eventually I became editor of the Yearbook here. And I've just completed this study finally of Jews and Germans in this one city from 1800 to 1945, which is at the moment with an American agent and I hope it will soon be published.

Tape 2: 2 minutes 53 seconds

BL: Did you feel it was necessary for the time to pass in order to face this topic?

JG: Obviously it must have been. I couldn't have tackled it any sooner. I didn't have the necessary distance to be able to write about it in a...as an historian should, you know, to try to understand what happened rather than simply deal with it emotionally.

BL: When did you go back to Germany? Did you ever go back to Berlin after the war?

JG: I – well – my first invitation was to the University of Hamburg where I made very good friends. I didn't go to Berlin until much later as part of the research I had to do because some of the archives were in Berlin, which I needed. And I feel absolutely - and I've been to Berlin several times since – that it's just an ordinary city. I don't find it particularly attractive. I don't feel emotional about Berlin one way or the other. I visited some of the sights. Our old house which we had on the Uhlandstrasse – our old flat - I had a look at that. I looked at where our house in Hohenzollerndamm was which was destroyed. I went to the Grunewald where we used to do our Sunday excursions, but it was a strange – almost a numbness, I think. Feelings of complete neutrality. Berlin is just to me another town and it has no emotional pull whatsoever. Hamburg means much more to me, but I've spent many years there, made good friends there, than Berlin. So I have no feelings either positive or negative as far as Berlin is concerned. And maybe this very non-feeling is a kind of feeling. No contact. I certainly couldn't live there. In fact, you know, I couldn't live anywhere in Germany despite good friendships.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 13 seconds

BL: When did you change your name?

JG: Fairly early on. It was all part of becoming English. And I remember asking my father...my eldest brother had changed his name and he'd chosen Grenville because he was a teacher of French. He thought this had a nice French sound to it. And I said to my father: 'Do you mind if we change our name?' He said: 'Not at all. But please all choose the same name because otherwise I'll never remember it.' So he didn't mind. There was such hatred of everything German, which included me of course.

BL: Tell us, what was your birth name?

JG: Gubrauer, which was actually a very distinguished name. We had very distinguished ancestors some of whom are in Meyer's Lexikon. But...it was also an attempt to completely cut off the past. It was psychological as well as practical because you couldn't get a job with a German name in those days.

BL: So... a reinvention of oneself?

JG: Yes, total reinvention. I was a new person.

BL: Well, you were at an age where you sort of could do it...or...

JG: Yes. And ever since I've gradually slipped back! [Laughs]

BL: How do you compare this to your brothers I mean, did they...?

JG: My eldest brother adjusted well and became a headmaster of a school. My, the second brother – I'm the youngest – did not adjust well, and I don't think ever got over the trauma of what happened - never made a normal life again. I think I became the most normal of all three. I married and had a family. My eldest brother didn't

marry; my other brother hasn't married. So I've led a very normal life. And, looking back, the early years, which in a sense were years of struggle, but they never felt like that. I was very glad I was at a school where I could learn whatever I wanted without any restrictions. One of the things that I did between the ages of 14 and 16 was read all the German classics. I don't think anyone has read the whole of the 'Grüner Heinrich' except me... Or 'Wilhelm Meister' from start to finish!

Tape 2: 8 minutes 6 seconds

BL: In England, yes?

JG: Yes, so there must have been something that attracted me to German – or Goethe's Faust – I read all that.

BL: And you didn't lose your German?

JG: I lost my spoken German, but not my reading German. So when I was first invited as a guest professor in Hamburg I gave all my lectures in English and the seminars in German. The second time I was invited I lectured in German, so the spoken German came back - slowly.

BL: So in general what impact did it have on your life to be a refugee?

JG: Who knows? Who knows how I would have turned out if I'd stayed in Germany? I would have become a German instead of being British. I mean...It's turned out much better. The Germans are so awkward aren't they? Stiff. Even though I've got very good friends, but... they're quite formal. No...no. I would have become a German, I think. That would have been fairly disastrous.

BL: A violinist?

JG: Hm?

BL: A violinist maybe?

JG: Probably not. I mean, I was good, but that degree of excellence I doubt whether I had that. I did give one semi-public concert in Berlin, playing Mozart sonatas, and I was only ten, so I was quite good...

BL: But you said...did you take up the violin in England? Did somebody give you a violin?

JG: Yes, but I never had a teacher so that was the end. You've got to have a teacher. You can't teach yourself.

BL: So what do you think would have happened if you had stayed in Germany?

Tape 2: 10 minutes 0 second

JG: I've no idea. I've no idea. I probably would have become a doctor, I think. That was something that interested me – medicine. It would have turned out quite differently. I think the very broad experience I've had – you know the two cultures, German and English... and American and to some extent the difficulties to be overcome – have obviously had an enormously positive effect on development. Whereas if none of this had happened and I'd only have been in one culture, leading a normal German life, I would never have done anything. I think some of the things I've written will last. I don't think any of that would have happened.

BL: In which way? You mention the positive effect of being exposed to two or three cultures.

JG: Yeah. I mean I think it's enormously intellectually stimulating. I think it helps to make you creative if you're not one-dimensional. And even the schooling, the fact that I did science instead of history and what I later did. All that's helped in the way I think.

BL: Do you feel you belong to England?

JG: Absolutely yes. Absolutely. The prejudices in England I mean are really amusing. In Birmingham, I was made Head of History, was appointed as the Head of the History Department. But then the rules came in that you had to be elected and I said: 'It's time I gave this up', and then they kept on re-electing me for twenty-five years. And I think the reason was I was probably a lot kinder than the average professor, you know, perhaps because of my own experiences which had relied on other people's kindness. And so I was understanding and kind and helped everybody as much as I could. And I think that's a reflection of how I was treated.

Tape 2: 12 minutes 52 seconds

That was one thing. The other reason I think was that my colleagues thought: 'Well he's Jewish, he must be terribly good at money. We're all dependent on income, so we'd better have him as our Chairman. He can get money for us out of the university.' and actually I did. I did very well. But that was sheer prejudice. Common prejudice. I teach a seminar now on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust just to students and I'll finish with that because that's an interesting story. Young students and the first meeting of this seminar – these are 18 year olds, 19 year olds – I hand them all a small piece of paper and I say: 'Would you all put down what you regard as the characteristic of Jews?' They all busily write it down. And then I collect these bits of paper and then I read them out. Most of them are terribly unflattering: 'You've got to be careful if you have business with a Jew' and 'They're good at money.' You know, all the common prejudices are there. And I read them all out. And then I say: 'Well, of course, I'm Jewish', and there's a terrible silence and awful embarrassment. And then I begin to talk to them about the nature of prejudice and making generalisations and so on. And after this seminar, the first one, a student came up to me and said: 'You know I'm Jewish and do you know I filled that in! I had some hesitations about filling it in, but even I filled it in because, you know, of the professor's authority.' So I said: 'Well there you are. Now you're beginning to understand.'

BL: How do you define yourself today in terms of your identity?

JG: Identity? Well I'm just me. I don't think about my identity. I'm whatever mix I am, which has changed over the years.

BL: In which way?

Tape 2: 15 minutes 12 seconds

JG: I'm much more at home with this multi-identity I have than I used to be. I used to want one identity – to be English. Now I don't care how many identities I have. I obviously have different identities in different circumstances.

BL: Do you think there was more pressure to fit in or to sort of...?

JG: Yes, exactly. I think that's the exact point. In my younger years I wanted to fit in and now I don't. I just am myself. And of course I discovered that the moment in my university life, where I stopped trying to fit in – it was just myself - at that point I was accepted as being English. But as long as I tried to fit in, I wasn't accepted fully. But once I said: 'This is me and I'm glad I'm not English', at that point I became fully accepted.

BL: What sort of identity did you try to transmit to your children?

JG: Nothing. Whatever they want. They're themselves. They're in America now. I think they feel themselves to be quite English. They feel themselves quite English actually - even in America. They've been there now 12, 15 years. They haven't lost their English accent at all. So they're all quite obviously quite self-confident in themselves.

BL: Just to finish up...since you had quite a bad experience with the Refugee Committee, how do you explain...what is your view on these policies, how the...?

JG: Well, what I said in my lecture was that the behaviour of an established minority – this was not peculiar to Jews – this is how established minorities behave when there's a large influx of the same minority who are not yet assimilated. They feel threatened. And I think Anglo-Jewry, firstly, felt threatened. Secondly - this is a later conclusion - Anglo Jewry was never particularly favourable to German Jewry, who had a bad record of treating Eastern Jewry in a prejudiced way. So I think this may have played a part. You know, these stuck up German Jews coming from middle-class families; this may have played a part. And thirdly, there was a genuine practical feeling that these children needed to have a vocation to earn their living as soon as possible. They couldn't rely on continual charity. So it was a mixture of all of those things. But certainly I don't blame them in any way. The main thing is they saved 10,000 lives and for that, whatever else happened, it pales into insignificance.

Tape 2: 18 minutes 23 seconds

BL: Lastly, do you have any message for anyone who might watch this tape?

JG: Not a generalised – everyone's experience is different. Not even to talk about Germans. There are lots of different Germans. And today's generation is totally

different to the generation of the Nazi period. They're much better. It's a much nicer generation than two or three generations ago. But not to generalise. Not to make generalisations about people – either Jews, Germans or anybody else. That's it.

BL: Professor Grenville, thank you very much for this interview.

JG: Pleasure.

Tape 2: 19 minutes 15 seconds

End of interview