

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Henry
Interviewee Sex:	Female
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Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

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INTERVIEW: 147

NAME: HENRY EBNER

DATE: 6 FEBRUARY 2007

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 7 seconds

BL: Today is the 6th of February 2007, we are conducting an interview with Mr Henry Ebner, my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

BL: Today is the 6th of February 2007, we are conducting an interview with Mr Henry Ebner, my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

BL: Can you please tell me your name?

HE: My name is Henry Ebner.

BL: And what was your name at birth?

HE: Heinz Ebner.

BL: And where were you born please?

HE: I was born in Vienna, Austria.

BL: And when were you born?

HE: I was born on the 20th of April 1937.

BL: Mr Ebner, thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Could we perhaps start by your telling us a bit about your family background?

HE: My parents were cinema proprietors in Vienna. My grandfather was born in Czernowitz, Romania and my father was also born in Czernowitz, Romania, and then migrated with his father to Vienna. And my mother was born in Steinamanger, which was on the border between Austria and Hungary. It's also known as Szombathely.

BL: When did your father emigrate to Vienna? Which year? Do you know?

HE: I don't know. He was a child when he emigrated.

BL: And what was your father's name and his father's name?

HE: My father's name was Berthold Maximilian Ebner, and my grandfather was Benjamin Ebner.

BL: And can you tell us about...Do you know how your parents met?

HE: I do know the background to it. My mother in fact was married to my father's brother. And my father's brother died of leukaemia quite young. They married quite young. And she knew my father through the family and a few years after my uncle died, she married my father.

Tape 1: 2 minutes 30 seconds

BL: And which year was that?

HE: She married my father in 1935.

BL: And can you tell us what was the profession of the grandparents?

HE: My grandfather was a lawyer in Romania and the story goes – it's just a family story – that in fact he was offered high office in Romania, the equivalent of Solicitor General or something like that. The condition attached to the offer was that he allowed himself to be baptised and he would not allow himself to be baptised and he said 'No', and from then on he knew that he had to leave Czernowitz and he migrated to Vienna. And he opened a law practice there.

BL: And on your mother's side?

HE: I don't know because my mother's father died quite young. I don't know what his profession was.

BL: Did you meet your grandparents?

HE: I never knew my grandparents. They knew me because they knew me before we left Austria when I was two. I can't remember them at all.

BL: Can you remember anything of Austria at all?

HE: Not as a child. I've subsequently visited Austria on several occasions.

BL: Tell us a bit more about your parents' cinemas?

HE: My parents ran and owned two cinemas – the Admiral Lichtspiel in the Burggasse and the Johann Strauss Kino in the Favoritengasse which is in Vienna 4.

Tape 1: 4 minutes 10 seconds

BL: And what sort of...what sort of films...?

HE: They were studio cinemas and I saw the cinemas after the war. Both cinemas were restituted to them. My mother got back the Admiral Kino in the late 40s early 50s. It was in the American Zone. You know Vienna was partitioned into four zones at the time. She then had to wait to get back the other cinema because that was in the Russian zone. She had to wait till the Austrian Peace Treaty, which I think was in 1954.

BL: And did they stay cinemas after the war?

HE: They stayed cinemas after the war. The one was sold after the war; the smaller one; Admiral Lichtspiel, was sold shortly after my mother had it returned to her. The other one she kept, but ultimately the lease ran out and it wasn't continued. She had a manager who ran both cinemas for her.

BL: Do you know how your parents...How did they get into having these two cinemas? What brought them to this...?

HE: I don't know. I don't know exactly. Family rumour has it that my grandfather financed their purchase at some stage. And my father studied law in fact but he didn't practice it. I don't think he qualified; he was too busy living it up. He had a very good life in Vienna by all accounts and it was something which was...it was a business for him to go into basically.

BL: Where did you live in Vienna?

HE: They lived in Burggasse. Above the cinema in the Burggasse. Burggasse 119 in Vienna 7. 7th Bezirk.

BL: What sort of circles did they mix in?

HE: Well they mixed in cinema circles. They mixed I think,...from what they said it was a Jewish circle, though they weren't particularly religious. Austrian Jews were pretty well assimilated at the time, so I understand, although my father did belong to two Zionist fraternities when he was a student. In fact he had scars – sword scars to show it. They're called Schmissee in German in case you didn't know.

Tape 1: 6 minutes 43 seconds

BL: And did they ever talk about what sort of films they showed ?

HE: Originally silent films. Then the Talkies came in... in fact I have a memento, which I've now given away to one of my children, which was in fact a Mickey Mouse watch , which was given by 20th Century Fox to all cinema owners at the time when the talkies came in. She's very keen on this. She's a film buff, my younger daughter.

BL: Was it a sort of...more a business, or a passion or...of your parents? I mean what did your father actually have to do, because your mother was also...?

HE: They ran the cinemas; they were there. They made sure they viewed the films from the distributors. They asked for them to be given to them to play. You went to cinema performances and then you either approved the film or you didn't approve the film. You showed it; you ran it; you were there. You were there to greet your customers. They were small businesses so they knew their customers.

BL: And how did the Anschluss affect...?

HE: Well the Anschluss affected my family considerably. Shortly after the Anschluss my father was asked to play Nazi propaganda films and he refused and he was then arrested. And in common with a lot of others, the Anschluss was on March the 13th, and he was arrested towards the end of March and sent to Dachau initially. And then, after spending some time in Dachau, he was sent to Buchenwald. He was fond of saying he helped lay the floors in Buchenwald.

Tape 1: 8 minutes 20 seconds

BL: And during that time was he in touch? Did your mother know what was happening to him?

HE: Yes I have letters which are post stamped Buchenwald. I have some correspondence between them, particularly letters from my father to my mother. I have those letters which I found amongst my parents' papers.

BL: And what did they say?

HE: I got rather upset in reading them so I didn't pursue it too closely.

BL: Did your mother try to get your father out...?

HE: My mother did try to get my father out. My mother was thrown out of her flat. She was thrown out of her flat and she went to live with friends who were very helpful to her. She also received some help from a family friend who was a lawyer, but a lawyer who was only allowed to act for Jews. And I have some of that correspondence as well: petitions, requesting remission of income tax on notional income that she didn't any more receive from the cinemas for which she had been assessed, which was all a bit macabre.

BL: Were you with your mother at the time when you had to leave the flat?

HE: Apparently so, yes. I remember nothing of that, but I have some documentation from witnesses who knew about it and who actually swore affidavits.

BL: When was your father released?

HE: My father was released in May, 1939 under some kind of amnesty which was then granted to a lot of people. It was a political amnesty to a lot of people who had been arrested. And he came back to Vienna and formalities then took a few months for him to come out. My mother had procured a forged visa to a Central American republic and with that, provided she could show that she was willing to leave to

country, she was let out. And she came to England on a domestic permit – a domestic working permit with my father, and with myself.

Tape 1: 10 minutes 35 seconds

BL: How did they manage to get that domestic visa?

HE: They got that through the authorities in Austria who helped Jews and through the auspices of the Jewish Aid Committee here.

BL: Did they have any connections to Britain? Did they know anyone...anyone of the family who had emigrated?

HE: They knew other people were trying to get to England, but I don't exactly know who had already arrived. No, a family friend had actually arrived who actually worked for the Jewish Committee. She was quite well known in refugee circles. Somebody called Stella Epstein.

BL: So when did your parents, and you, when did you leave Vienna?

HE: We left Vienna in early August, 1939. I think it must have been round about the 10th of August. We flew to Brussels and stayed a few days in Brussels, and then my uncle and aunt were in Brussels (that's my mother's brother and sister-in-law) and then took the boat to Dover. I'm not sure quite from where.

BL: You don't remember any of that?

HE: I don't remember.

BL: How old were you?

HE: I was two...just over.

BL: What are your earliest memories in England – in the UK?

HE: My earliest memory... My earliest memory is in fact of being ill in Norfolk. I'm told it was in a vicarage where my parents worked in Norfolk. They were butler and parlour maid to a Reverend Carroll in Binham in Norfolk, which is a little village in the middle of nowhere in Norfolk. And it was a considerable change for my parents but of course they were glad to get out and glad to be there. I know I'm told the vicar liked my mother's cooking.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 30 seconds

BL: Austrian cooking?

HE: Yes, Austrian cooking.

BL: Was this their first job?

HE: It was their first job here, yes. My father later took his driving test as well. I'm not quite sure...possibly in Hunstanton which was a little town nearby.

BL: And how did they adapt to this change?

HE: I think they found it very difficult, particularly my mother. But both of them - they'd lived in cosmopolitan Vienna, they'd had a good life there, and suddenly they found they were domestic servants in a village where hardly anybody spoke German. My father learnt English quite quickly and became relatively fluent in it. My mother always struggled a bit. I always spoke German to my mother.

BL: So while your mother was working, who was taking care of you?

HE: I don't know. I would imagine that I was left to my own devices. I don't know. I would imagine that she kept an eye on me; perhaps I was in the kitchen with her. I don't know.

BL: It's interesting that they took you on as a family.

HE: Yes, they were very nice people. The Reverend Carroll lived there with his two sisters. They were two ladies, I'm told, who used to hibernate in the winter.

BL: Yes, you said you remember being ill...

HE: I remember being ill and waking up and being told 'You're now getting better.' But that's really all I remember of the time in Norfolk.

BL: Do you remember any...what was your life like in Norfolk, or your parents' life?

HE: I have no idea whatsoever. I'm sure it wasn't easy for them. I mean they came with 15 shillings and one suitcase.

BL: And how long did your parents...how long did you stay there?

HE: My parents stayed in Norfolk until...until internment was brought in in 1940. The Brits lost their nerve at the time in 1940. They thought the... particularly the east of England was going to be overrun by spies, so they interned everybody. Well, everybody...sorry, you'll have to cut that, I've got cramp.

Tape 1: 14 minutes 38 seconds

BL: So I just asked how long your parents stayed in Norfolk.

HE: Yes my parents stayed in Norfolk until my father was interned in the Isle of Man. They stayed there until 1940 and at the time the Brits lost their nerve and they thought the country was being overrun by spies - quite understandably. And so they invoked one of the defence regulations and they arrested a lot of 'friendly enemy aliens' as they called them and sent them to the Isle of Man. My father was sent there, but significantly, not my mother nor myself. Only my father and he spent a few weeks there.

BL: Did he talk about this time?

HE: Yes he said he was treated very well and he was amongst people who spoke his language and he was not unhappy there, but of course he was worried about his family. And, at the time, my mother had come to London. And with the assistance of the Jewish Aid Committee they found her a room for herself and myself. We stayed in Bloomsbury somewhere and my mother used to tell me that she went down to the Underground station which served as an underground shelter. I think it was either Goodge Street or Warren Street.

BL: How old was your father when he was interned?

HE: When he was interned in 1940 my father was 36.

BL: Quite young.

HE: Yes. The Brits treated the internees very well and they...one of my father's friends said he had the time of his life there. He used to play in the Vienna Hakoah and he organised football matches for the army there.

BL: So when your father came back from internment he also came to London?

HE: Yes my father came to London and the family was then sent to Guildford. We were evacuated to Guildford in common with a lot of other refugees. Initially we lived in a small flat in Worplesdon Road in Guildford and then we were transferred to a rooming house which was eventually bought up by a Quaker lady who placed this rooming house at the disposal of the refugees. There were several families in the house. And...It was a very wonderful thing to do. I mean the Quakers were extremely helpful to the refugees – particularly in Guildford. For example, they placed a...they hired a hall and placed that at the disposal of the refugees and called themselves the International Club. They met there every Sunday, to play cards, Tarok, bridge, and other games and had refreshments. My father was the first chairman of this so called International Club.

BL: In Guildford?

HE: In Guildford, yes.

BL: And so this was all organised by the Refugee Committee?

Tape 1: 17 minutes 43 seconds

HE: No it was the Quakers who actually organised it and then they organised it amongst themselves.

BL: No, initially that you were sent to...?

HE: Oh yes. That's right, the Jewish Aid Committee, as they were then known; they actually arranged for the accommodation. And I mean the lady was quite remarkable who bought this house. Eventually, she sold the house to my father after the war.

BL: So were there lots of other refugees in Guildford?

HE: Yes, there were an awful lot of refugees in Guildford and the immediate environment of Guildford. The suburbs of Guildford, the little villages and little towns in the area: Woking, Cranley...

BL: Any memories of Guildford?

HE: Yes, considerable memories of Guildford. I grew up in the war in Guildford.

BL: Yes?

HE: What would you like to know?

BL: Well, first of all, what did you speak? Did you speak English or German?

HE: We spoke German at home and I spoke English when I went to Kindergarten and I managed to acquire both languages and keep both languages. And it was a sensible thing to do looking back. And my father always said the language wasn't at fault. And he was quite right. It helped me in my later profession.

Tape 1: 18 minutes 51 seconds

BL: Do you remember, what was it like as a little boy? Did you feel like you were a refugee or did you feel... different?

HE: I went to a school for refugee children eventually after kindergarten. I was just over 8 and initially I didn't like it 'cause I was an only child and probably spoilt, and probably rather attached to my mother's apron strings. But then, when I learnt a little bit of self-reliance, it was rather better. I was only lonely in the holidays because I didn't have any friends in the holidays. And of course the friends were in a German-speaking environment as well – they were mainly elderly people as well. There were very few youngsters, so I did feel lonely because there were no children of my age there who I could do things with.

BL: But until the age of 8 you went to a local...?

HE: I went to a local kindergarten. Yes.

BL: Yes. And do you remember? Was that was an issue that your parents came from Vienna? Was that ever discussed or...?

HE: We were made to say The Lord's Prayer every day until my father discovered that and didn't like that, so he got me exempted from that. I didn't know its significance at the time.

BL: Were you the only Jewish boy?

HE: I was probably the only Jewish child in this kindergarten, yes.

BL: So what made your parents decide to send you to this specific school – to the refugee school?

HE: Well they'd heard it had a good reputation. They...I think they wanted me to also be more self-reliant which is why they sent me there. And it worked.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 26 seconds

BL: So tell us a bit more about this school. The name please, and where it was.

HE: The school was Stroatley Rough School. It was between Haslemere and Hindhead at the top of Farnham Lane in Haslemere. It was very near the Common and it was a lovely environment to be in. It was a coeducational boarding school consisting mainly of refugee children. Some LCC children later, and some local children as well. Eventually it attained grammar school status.

BL: What are LCC children?

HE: London County Council children from difficult homes. I'm still friendly with some of the children who I met there. In fact I'm going to see one in the States shortly.

BL: So when was the school set up for the refugees?

Tape 1: 21 minutes 15 seconds

HE: The school was set up in 1934 after Hitler. At the time, two German ladies – Dr Hilda Lion from Hamburg and Dr Ellie Wolff who came...who was a friend of Professor Reuss and who came from the Ruhr area, I can't remember exactly where. And also somebody called Miss Nacken who was a matron there. She was also one of the prime movers in setting it up. Dr Lion had sort of advanced and unusual ideas for education, but she went back to Germany every year to drum up business for the school if you like. The school itself, the grounds were again placed at the disposal of the school by the Quakers. They were very beautiful if somewhat primitive surroundings. It was a big house and later there were little huts added to it which served as sleeping quarters. The set-up was quite cosmopolitan in many ways and we had to do a lot of the chores ourselves. There was a big potato peeling machine there so we had to take turns. We had a rota, the bigger boys operating this potato peeling machine. We did the washing in the school. And there was also a farm in the school with a farmer. It was about a 10-minute, quarter of an hour walk from the school called The Farm. Again it had huts there where some of the older children lived. And some of the older children actually got involved in farming. And also tapped the stream to build a swimming pool. It was a horrible swimming pool but it served its purpose. We used to go swimming there and we used to pick the leeches off each other as we got out.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 16 seconds

BL: So it was run by these...?

HE: It was run by them. Later somebody called Dr Louise Leven from Krefeld in Germany joined them. She had actually been in charge of the synagogue choir in Krefeld in Germany, and she was actually a musician. She was very musically gifted and she actually joined them. So, by that time, Mrs Nacken had already left, I think. But the three ladies – Dr Lion, Dr Leven and Dr Wolff - ran the school and they ran it till the 60s I think. Till the early '60s

BL: So the first children were actually children who had come from Germany without their parents?

HE: They'd come from Germany or other parts of Europe. After the war there were quite a few from Poland, who'd survived in Poland and came out. Some were Schonfeld children. You've heard of Dr Schonfeld I'm sure, who brought the children out, I mean one of my close friends was a Schonfeld child.

BL: So did most people have parents in England or not, among your friends?

HE: Some did and some didn't - some had lost their parents. I mean this particular friend was in Poland. He knew his parents had died. His brother, whom I also know, who now lives in Canada had seen his father shot in front of him, so that must have been very traumatic.

BL: So was anything done to address...was there anything special in the school to...? It must have been a difficult situation for those children. I mean was that apparent to you as a fellow pupil?

HE: It was not apparent. I mean they were...I suppose they were damaged and they were temperamental and they were excitable, but this didn't appear. No. It was not noticeable by me. Let's put it that way: it was not noticeable by me, although one did realise that a lot of these children had suffered hardship, considerable hardship.

BL: Did you feel you sort of shared a common background or not? I mean you were very young; it must have been...compared to the others?

Tape 1: 25 minutes 28 seconds

HE: That's a difficult question. We had some of the children back with us for Seder sometimes - in Pesach my parents ran a Seder. They were not particularly religious but they ran a Seder. And they tried to give the...one of my close friends he used to stay with us in the holidays.

BL: What about the language in school? Was there any German spoken, or...?

HE: Very little. I mean lessons were conducted in English. They taught German and English. Taught German and French – Dr Wolff taught German and French and she

took it up to A-Level eventually. She was very gifted and obviously a person of great intellect.

BL: So were there school fees? Who paid for the...?

HE: Initially I think my parents paid a reduced fee and later the Surrey County Council paid as far as my fees were concerned. They gave me a sort of scholarship I suppose - a sort of grant.

BL: What about the other children's fees?

HE: Some...I think the Jewish Aid Committee may have paid something towards the upkeep of these other children, yes.

BL: And did those teachers, did they bring some of those progressive educational ideas with them...you mentioned briefly before?

HE: Well, they were very keen on seeing that the children were self-reliant. I mean we had lessons which involved cleaning the place, using a big polisher on the floors, dusting, cleaning, washing up, gardening, being involved in tidying. We were encouraged to make sure that the place ran itself.

BL: How different was it from an ordinary English boarding school?

HE: I wouldn't know. I didn't go to one. I wouldn't know at all what...there was a structure in place but it was a loose structure.

BL: What about religion in the school?

Tape 1: 27 minutes 41 seconds

HE: Very little. We had Dr Maybaum, Ignaz Maybaum who came down once a week and spent an hour with each class, so he polished off the classes by the day in that day, and that was all.

BL: At that time he was at which synagogue?

HE: At that time he was at Edgware Reform where I was Bar Mitzvah, ultimately.

BL: Because of that connection?

HE: Yes, because of that connection, yes.

BL: So it wasn't a sort of very religious upbringing in the school?

HE: No it wasn't, and I don't think the head believed very much in religion for religion's sake. She knew she was Jewish but I think it didn't really...I think her object was I think to provide schooling for refugee children, but I don't think it went further than that.

BL: Were all the children Jewish?

HE: No. Some of them were not. In fact the other children also got tuition from the local reverend, the local vicar, who came up, whose daughter was at the school.

BL: What about youth movements and things like that? Were they attached...?

HE: No. No. It didn't come into the scheme of things.

BL: So the self-reliance you think was part of the sort of educational idea...

HE: Yes.

BL: ...to manage.

HE: Yes. To manage in later life. There were also later LCC problem children which caused problems amongst themselves. There were quite some difficult children there in the school and so on, so it was a little bit difficult.

Tape 1: 29 minutes 25 seconds

BL: You were there from which age to...?

HE: I was there from 8 to 18 and eventually ended up by being head boy there and having my own little room there.

BL: So that's quite a long time, 10 years.

HE: Yeah. One of the duties of the head boy was in fact to take the children out for a run, every morning, at 7 o'clock when the bell went and you'd have to take the kids out for an early morning run and do some exercises and then we could actually wash and get dressed. Another one of my duties was that I ran the school heating system. They had a big boiler which I had to fill with anthracite in the evening and keep going during the day. And also to light the fires in the huts which were also used as school rooms. So, every morning after the run, I tended to the fires, lit the fires in the huts, stoked up the boiler, made sure that the – in the winter – made sure that the – in fact that the main building was warm. And I got paid for that. I think I got £2 a week for that and was very pleased with that pocket money.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 30 seconds

BL: What was it like then to go back to your parents in the holidays?

HE: It was always nice to get home, but I was always quite happy to get back to school as well, eventually.

BL: Did it give you a feeling of belonging or...?

HE: At the school?

BL: Yes.

HE: I suppose so. I was part of the community there, yes. Yes. I used to enjoy getting back to my friends.

BL: And, in the meantime, what happened to your parents in those 10 years?

HE: My father was originally a representative for a...first of all in the war he was a carpenter. He was only allowed to do war-essential work, so he was a carpenter on a bench. He'd learnt carpentry in Austria. I think the Jews had all been prepared for some kind of additional work that they could do...some kind of professional work, and he learnt carpentry. So he was always a good carpenter, so he was on the bench at Crosby's in Farnham. After the war he was allowed to do other work. And eventually...We were naturalised in 1948. He then became...he stayed in the timber industry. He became the representative for a timber company and then the manager for a timber company. He had his ups and downs with that but he never was self-employed again. I think he'd actually lost the...He wanted the security of being employed. I think he'd lost the ambition of being self-employed.

Tape 1: 32 minutes 6 seconds

BL: Where did your parents live?

HE: Initially in Guildford. As I said before, the Quaker lady, when other people...towards the end of the war people started leaving the house. They went up to London and eventually we were the only ones left in the house. The lady who was called Miss Wallace came to my father and she said to him: 'I've got no further use for this house, would you like to buy it?' And he said: 'Yes, I'd like to buy it but with what?' so she said: 'Well, I'll take it to my bank and I'll guarantee a bank loan.' So he said: 'Well that's very kind of you.' So that's what happened. She guaranteed his bank loan, and she then said: 'But you've got to find a deposit.' I think a deposit was £100 or something, so he said: 'Well I haven't got a deposit.' She said: 'Well I'll lend you the deposit.' And he paid it back by instalments and that's how the first house in Guildford was bought. And, eventually, my parents decided a lot of people moved up to London and they wanted also to move up to London. So they sold the house in Guildford and moved up to Woodside Park – they bought a house in Woodside Park in London. So that was really a very helpful thing, a wonderful thing for the Quakers and for this particular lady to do. Amazing.

Tape 1: 33 minutes 26 seconds.

BL: And did they live within a sort of refugee community in London?

HE: They still associated almost exclusively with a German-speaking environment. They had their close friends. And I think it was a very close-knit community. They had three or four couples who were their friends. They sometimes went to what they called an International Club, which was run by – I forget – it was run by a couple who were very...I forget where they used to meet... Somewhere in the Finchley Road I think they met for a while. They were very keen on going to the Dorice Restaurant, meeting their friends there, and the Cosmo Restaurant occasionally and to Schmitt's

in Charlotte Street, so all the continental restaurants which were well known at the time.

BL: Did they join a synagogue in London?

HE: No. They didn't. My father in fact having been in a concentration camp he... He didn't want to know.

BL: But you said you had a Bar Mitzvah?

HE: That was about it. Yes that was it. I can't even say it was a shore leaving Bar Mitzvah.

BL: Tell us about the Bar Mitzvah.

HE: Well looking back it was a little bit farcical. I mean I sort of learnt phonetically a little Paraschah and gabbled it off in the synagogue. We went up on the Shabbas on the Saturday – we went up very early to the service. I did what I had to do and that was it. Then we went out to lunch and then we went out to the theatre in the afternoon. It was a very odd sort of Bar Mitzvah looking back from what I know now.

BL: Rabbi Maybaum was involved?

HE: Rabbi Maybaum was involved. Yes, he was... He was very helpful.

BL: Do you remember...? What else do you remember about Rabbi Maybaum?

HE: He was a kind man. He was quiet and soft spoken. He was very pleasant and that's really all I remember.

BL: So then when you finished school, where did you move to?

Tape 1: 35 minutes 43 seconds

HE: Well I scraped into the LSE with my A-Levels. I got a good – I got a very good A-Level in German and - not unnaturally - and also I did French and Latin and I got in. And I found the LSE very difficult in the first year. I hadn't really learned how to study. The standard of teaching perhaps was not particularly high in the school. So I had a very difficult first year. After the first year at the LSE I was O.K. I'd learnt how to...well I'd learnt how to organise myself and how to study and oh I was always blessed with a reasonable memory. So I managed to get a good degree.

BL: And did you move back to your parents, or...?

HE: I stayed with my parents yes. And I then did Articles as they were then known. It's now a training contract. I then did Articles in Law. The degree I obtained was in law and I then...I got funding in fact for the law tutorial college called Gibson Weldon, which I attended for 6 months and then did my solicitor's finals and then got a job as an assistant solicitor.

BL: And what sort of law did you specialise in?

HE: Initially it was general practice. I had wanted to litigate because I hadn't litigated much during my training, so I wanted to do more litigation than other work. But eventually I did all kinds of work until I eventually...I took over a very run-down practice. I qualified in 1961 and became a salaried partner to the firm where I was assistant solicitor. And then I took over this practice in 1965, in January 1965, which was a general practice in Hammersmith. And I was a partner in that practice from 1961 till 2002...1965 till 2002 - from when I became a consultant of the firm.

BL: And did you also deal with issues of restitution?

Tape 1: 38 minutes 0 second

HE: I came to restitution work by accident. A client of the firm's had in fact been married to a refugee and been contacted by some relatives in Israel and they'd been in touch with a particular firm of lawyers in Berlin. She came to me and she said: 'I understand you speak German.' And I then got involved with her. We registered the claim. At that time I also started advertising in the AJR Bulletin. I've run this advertisement in the AJR Bulletin ever since I think 1990-odd. I then got involved in about 16 to 20 restitution cases one way or another. With reasonable success. I worked with some very good lawyers. A firm...the person who ran the restitution department there was called von Trott, Dr von Trott, who also speaks English as well. He's made a speciality of restitution work and still deals with it and he also made a speciality of following up looted art. Although I'm not concerned with that, I was approached on a couple of occasions with queries on looted art. And I had to...to turn the matter down, the case down because I didn't have the resources to follow it, which was a shame. Actual restitution cases. restitution of property, we did quite well and did quite well for a couple of clients.

BL: So do you get a lot of people through the AJR magazine actually contacting you?

HE: I would like to say yes, but I don't get all that many any more. I did get some queries. They were mainly odd little queries which I could deal with over the phone and which I obviously don't make a charge for. But I did get the odd clients from them and one particular client was involved in restitution. We did very well for them. They ended up with £750,000- £1,000,000 in the value of restituted property, which was then sold. They were a very poor couple and I was very pleased.

BL: So it was more property?

Tape 1: 40 minutes 32 seconds

HE: It was property. Because of course there was a window of opportunity to register claims between 1989 and December 1992. If claims weren't registered by then, you lost the chance to claim. Although the Jewish Claims Conference had at that time registered, made block claims for all heirless Jewish property. And the Jewish Claims Conference, then under considerable pressure I think from other sources, decided where people hadn't claimed they would actually refund a proportion of the value of

properties that had been sold and that's still going on at the moment. I had a client recently who ended up with a few thousand pounds as a result of a small claim.

BL: So did that work also take you to Austria?

HE: I went to Germany a couple of times. I've also had some Austrian clients one way or the other either through family connections or friends' connections. I got involved in Austrian pension claims. And again I had a very good lawyer in Vienna, who helped me considerably with the registration of the claims. It's amazing the number of people throughout the world who were ignorant of the fact that they were entitled to Austrian pensions. It wasn't publicised particularly well. I've acted for two or three people in the States who got Austrian pensions.

BL: Did your parents ever go back to Vienna?

HE: Only to visit. Partly, I suppose, to spend the earnings from the cinemas. They enjoyed going. I think they enjoyed going to resorts there. They used to say: 'It's a lovely country, pity about the people.'

Tape 1: 42 minutes 15 seconds

BL: So they went on holidays...in the 50s?

HE: They went on holidays. I remember going after the war there, the first time I ever saw mountains, going to Bad Gastein with them and that was superb as a child of eleven. It was wonderful to see the mountains and to go tobogganing and to try some skiing. It was very nice. And we went to Bad Ischl, to the Wörthersee and Millstättersee. Yes, it was very pleasant.

BL: Did your parents still have any friends left, or...?

HE: They had friends through their... My father belonged to Zionist fraternities and some of his friends went back to Vienna. Mainly those who didn't have children went back because of course they enjoyed a far higher standard of living than they could ever hope to get abroad, particularly in England. I mean a lot of them didn't know the language in this country particularly well and had a real struggle, whereas in Vienna they got reinstatement with their jobs and they lived a comfortable life. But those with children, I think, were more circumspect and I think they wanted their children to grow up in the host country like the United States or England.

BL: Did your parents ever consider going back to Austria?

HE: They considered it, but they rejected it immediately. They always said that, although they'd have probably had a better life, having enjoyed a very good life before the war, up to the time of Hitler, they rejected the idea. They thought the future was in the UK.

Tape 1: 44 minutes 0 second

BL: What happened to your grandparents?

HE: My two surviving grandparents were sent to Theresienstadt and one died in Theresienstadt and one was deported to Auschwitz as I have discovered comparatively recently. I always thought they both died in Theresienstadt, but I recently had evidence to that effect.

BL: How did you...do you know when your parents found out about this?

HE: I think they found out that they died, after the war. I remember their being extremely upset on one occasion and not saying much about it. But I think that must have been when they discovered it. And my father's sister also perished. She was deported as well with her husband and with their child, as were other members of the family.

BL: But still when you went to Austria for the first time it was a positive experience?

HE: I felt positive because it was through the eyes of a child and it was an eye-opener. And it was interesting because we still had austerity in this country and it was just amazing to see with Marshall Aid, to see what was available in Austria. The Konditoreien were all open and you could have your Indianer mit Schlag) or you could have your Sachertorte and you had plenty of fruit... it was all available although it was under four power occupation. You could have what you wanted; you could eat in the restaurants. There was no rationing. It was – it was amazing.

BL: So what sort of identity did your parents try to transmit to you?

HE: I think that they felt this country had offered sanctuary and that I should be proud of this country and be proud of being a British citizen, a British subject, and that I should make my life here. They felt that very keenly.

Tape 1: 46 minutes 2 second

BL: You didn't tell us, yes, when did you change your name?

HE: Well, it was changed for me effectively. People started to call me Henry because 'Heinz' was too Germanic obviously, so it was changed on my father's naturalisation document.

BL: So they wanted you to be British?

HE: Yes, they wanted to anglicize me. Yeah.

BL: For you today, what is the most important part of your, let's say, continental background?

HE: I think that's a very difficult question. I'm aware of it. I'm aware of the fact that I came to this country and this country offered me sanctuary. I identify to some degree with Viennese music. I watch the New Year's Day concert every year from Vienna. I feel some...I do feel some attachment to Vienna. We took our granddaughter for her Bar Mitzvah to Vienna about thirteen, fourteen months ago and we booked for the

opera and it was a wonderful experience. We had a guide there and she enjoyed it enormously and we plan to do the same thing, all being well, please god, for our grand son who will be Bar Mitzvah in about a year's time. So there is some identification with the continental background there certainly, and I do occasionally still dream in German, which is quite odd. You know Albert Schweitzer gave certain criteria for being bilingual. You calculate in the language, you dream in the language, and obviously speak in the language. Well, I still dream in the language. I can still calculate in the language but obviously I don't, it's easier in English. Of course I'm losing my German, but it is actually quite interesting.

BL: Because obviously most of your life you were in Britain.

HE: Hmm, but of course I spoke German at home and, through our German Referendar in the office, I still am able to practice my German.

BL: So how would you describe yourself today in terms of your identity?

Tape 1: 48 minutes 26 seconds

HE: Oh I'm British. There's no question about that. And my children have grown up in this country and they identify with this country as well. There's no question about that, but I'm British with a continental background. I think that's perhaps the best way of putting it.

BL: Did you talk about your background with your children? Was that important?

HE: Yes, they're well aware of it. In fact I've given some of this, if you like, testimony. I've given some of this to my journalist daughter who's taped it. So, yes, they're very interested in it and in fact my daughter, who's head of a school here in Hampstead, she recently took some of my documentation material for Holocaust Memorial Day and addressed the school on it and told them something of her background. So, I think they identify with it; they're interested in it and it's very important to them.

BL: You also said you just recently found out about your grandparents...and Auschwitz?

HE: Comparatively recently...

BL: Yes, so you actively did research?

HE: I did research something. Yes.

BL: And obviously you have lots of documents so it's an important...?

HE: Well I have some documents which show what happened to my parents and up to the end of the war and how they managed to get employment in this country and so on, yes.

BL: Did...you didn't answer about your mother. Did she work in the UK?

HE: My mother worked part of the time. She worked at home. I remember her making lampshades and doing sort of outdoor work of that nature. She then...she worked as a bookkeeper a part time bookkeeper for the firm where my father was a manager. So yes, part of the time she did work. She went up to London from Guildford daily to work in the afternoons and do the bookkeeping.

Tape 1: 50 minutes 28 seconds

BL: And later, when they were in London?

HE: Then I think she stopped work. She'd stopped work by then. She suffered from her nerves and she...yes, I think it affected her very badly that she had to leave her mother behind, and I don't think that she forgot that lightly.

BL: But, would you say by the end of their lives...did they settle here?

HE: I think they were content to live here yes. I mean unfortunately my father died quite young. He was 64 when he died. My mother survived till she was 87 so she survived another...over 20 years after that and she was not very happy – lonely and not very happy. Very reliant on me, so it was quite difficult being an only child, particularly in those sorts of circumstances.

BL: So she relied on your support?

HE: But she was very, she was...Eventually she went to Leo Baeck House and she was in there because after having slight strokes...and they treated her very well there, in Leo Baeck House. She had wonderful care there. She was a resident there. Somewhat withdrawn, but she had a happier time there certainly in the German-speaking environment there. And she enjoyed that from 1986 to 1992. So she was there 6 years.

BL: So it was important to be in a German...?

HE: Yes. I think it was very important to be in that sort of environment.

Tape 1: 52 minutes 6 seconds

BL: Did you continue to speak German to her?

HE: I always spoke German to her when we were alone. When my wife was present I didn't always speak German. My wife has sort of acquired some German on the hoof as a result, but yes, I always spoke to her in German. It was useful to practise it, and it was much easier for her.

BL: I'm just thinking...whether you consider yourself a first generation or second generation refugee because...?

HE: Well, technically, I'm certainly first generation, but I suppose to all intents and purposes, I'm second generation. Technically, I'm certainly first generation because I came here as a refugee.

BL: Do you have any message for somebody who might watch this film, based on your experiences?

HE: I think that's a difficult question to answer. I think the message is that one should be very grateful to the host country for offering sanctuary when they needed it. And that thank God it worked out well.

BL: Do you think your life would have been very different if your parents – and you – hadn't been forced to emigrate?

HE: Oh yes, vastly different. I don't know whether I'd have studied law. Probably yes. I would probably have had a law practice in Vienna. I wouldn't have married my wife. I certainly wouldn't have met my wife. And things would have been... Yes things would have been vastly different. And I probably would have taken greater interest in the film industry.

BL: Is there anything else you'd like to add which I haven't asked you? Anything important that you'd like to mention?

HE: Just that I'm grateful that I've had the opportunity of bringing up a family in this country and that I'm blessed with three wonderful children and grandchildren. And various, seven, grandchildren. So that's really all that I have to say.

BL: Mr Ebner, thank you very much for this interview.

HE: Yes. Thank you.

Tape 1: 54 minutes 40 seconds.

Tape 1: 54 minutes 53 seconds

BL: You wanted to add something to this interview.

HE: Yes I just wanted to add that a second cousin of my father's called Dr Ludwig Hift was in Theresienstadt and I thought it was a story worth mentioning. He was already on the way out on the train, and the Germans hauled him off because they remembered he was a banker. And he was then requested to set up the banking system for Theresienstadt because I think a lot of the people who see this will probably know that Theresienstadt was the show camp for the Red Cross. It was shown by the Germans to the Red Cross on the basis that, 'Look, we're treating the Jews very nicely here.' Anyway he set up the banking system for Theresienstadt and that saved his life and, afterwards, when he returned to Austria he was reinstated in his former position and he progressed and eventually became a director of the Austrian Länderbank and also President of the Austrian Red Cross. And in fact he showed me the book of Theresienstadt which the Germans meticulously kept and my parents were

mentioned in that as well, so... that's basically the story of how being a banker helped save Dr Ludwig Hift's life.

BL: Thank you.

Tape 1: 56 minutes 10 seconds

End of Tape One

Photographs

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minute 4 seconds

BL: Can you please describe this photo?

HE: That's a picture of my paternal grandparents, Benjamin Ebner and Salome Ebner.

BL: And when was it taken?

HE: I don't know exactly but it must be when they were in their late 40s or early 50s – late 40s I would have thought, yes.

BL: And where?

HE: I don't know. I have no idea.

HE: Yes, that's a picture of my maternal grandparents. That is grandpa Klinger and his wife. And my mother is between them. She must have been aged between one or two. That must have been taken around 1907 or 1908.

BL: Yes please.

HE: That's a picture of my mother with her brother, Dr. Stephen Klinger, who eventually ended up in the United States. That must have been taken round about 1914, 1915.

BL: Where?

HE: I would imagine that was taken in Vienna.

HE: Yes, that's a picture of my father as a young man playing a musical instrument. He must have been in his early...he must have been between eighteen and twenty I would have thought at the time. So that must have been taken round about shortly after the end of the First World War, probably 1920-1922.

HE: Yes, that is a picture of my parents, probably taken round about 1935. They were obviously at some kind of function. It was probably during or just before the function which they attended. I suspect it was one of the Zionist functions because he belonged to two Zionist fraternities. And judging from his garb, it was... the cap he was wearing, looks like the cap of one of the Zionist fraternities to which he belonged.

Tape 2: 2 minutes 27 seconds

HE: That's a picture of myself in the back garden at 8 Parkhurst Road in Guildford. Obviously, I was a youngster then. I don't know my exact age. That's all I know about the photograph.

HE: That's a photograph of my mother with a lady called Mrs Stella Epstein and myself. Mrs Epstein was a member of the Jewish Aid Committee, who came to England relatively early and was helpful to a lot of refugees in getting them positions in this country. I don't know how old I was at the time. It looks as if I was about 10 or 11.

HE: That's a photograph of my father in the uniform of the Auxiliary Fire Service for which he volunteered during the war – some time during the war. But that was his uniform and that's a rather interesting picture.

HE: That's a picture of my parents and myself taken in the back garden in Guildford. I must have been about ten or eleven at the time and that's really all I can say about it.

HE: That photograph was taken in 1958 – in fact at Christmas 1958 when Dr Ludwig Hift came to Holland and my parents and I visited my father's cousin in Holland, Karl Vortrefflich who's not in the picture. The picture is: Ludwig Hift, Maria Vortrefflich, Karl's wife in Utrecht in Holland...

BL: Where are the people from left to right?

HE: Oh from left to right my mother, my father, Maria von Vortrefflich, Dr Ludwig Hift, and myself. I was at that time a law student at the LSE.

HE: Yes, that photograph was taken in late 1968. It's of my wife Ann and myself with our older daughter Joanna, now known as Jo, and Mark as a baby of about 4-6 months. And that was taken in our house in Kenton.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 3 seconds

HE: That's a photograph of the Ebner family taken in August 2004 on our 40th wedding anniversary. Left to right, there's Daniel Karai Ebner, there's Brian Statt, then there's Janine Karai, myself, Katie Ebner Landy at the back, there's Ann Ebner. Jo Ebner Landy. Aaron Landy, and in the front row there's Ella Karai Ebner, Sarah Ebner, Jessica Ebner Statt, Rebecca Ebner Landy and right at the front on the right is Sam Ebner Landy.

HE: That's a photograph of the Johann Strauss Kino, which is the cinema, one of the cinemas, which my parents owned. It's in the 4th district in Vienna, and I'm not quite sure when the photograph was taken because I think it was provided by the Austrians.

HE: This is a photograph on a pass which was issued to my mother as a cinema owner in Vienna. The pass entitled her to go to premieres, presentations of films before they were put on release with a view to them being shown at the relevant cinemas.

Tape 2: 6 minutes 42 seconds

HE: This is a notification from the Central Office for Refugees in Bloomsbury House to my parents, then in Vienna, intimating that the Reverend Carroll had expressed himself prepared to accept my parents as domestic servants, and that application had been made for a domestic work permit to allow them into the UK on that basis. And it's dated June, 1939.

HE: This is a further letter from the Central Office for Refugees to my parents intimating that they'd had consular clearance and that a work permit was being issued to allow them to go to the UK to go to work for the Reverend Carroll in Binham, Norfolk.

HE: This is the reverse side of the letter referred to previously from the Central Office for Refugees. It mentions various conditions for the employment, in particular Clause 12 is of interest since this mentions that the domestic servants should 'do their best in their new job and they should bear in mind that if they work well, it will only do others good and if they work badly it might reflect badly on others who might have to be in similar circumstances and who might follow on in the same sort of work.' 'Got a bit tongue-tied...'

HE: This is a record of male internees that they sent for Promenade Internment Camp in the Isle of Man. It gives details relating to my father, what he did in Austria, his religion and also his address at the vicarage in Binham, Norfolk.

HE: This is the reverse side of the previous page. It gives reasons why my father...at the bottom of the page it says that he's a refugee from Nazi oppression Category C and that he spent time in Dachau and Buchenwald, and that he should be released. It gives the relevant information at the foot of the page.

BL: Mr Ebner, thank you very much again for this interview.

HE: You're very welcome.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 20 seconds

End of photographs.