

Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS meets William Kaczynski, co-author of a new book, *Fleeing from the Führer, A Postal History of Refugees from the Nazis*, and talks to him, both in the city of his birth, Berlin, and in London, where the book was launched in November.



William Kaczynski pictured during the launch of his book *Fleeing from the Führer*, at the Royal Philatelic Society London, on 8 November 2011. All pictures by Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS unless otherwise stated

At The Berlin Wall with the Author of *Fleeing from the Führer*



Picture by David Beech FRPSL

millinery business. Since his retirement in 1989 William Kaczynski has amassed a unique and important collection of postal history material – postcards, envelopes, ephemera and memorabilia from the field of Holocaust history and has written for various philatelic publications. He worked closely with the British Library in compiling his collection, much of which is featured in his book.

William Kaczynski is a member of the Royal Philatelic Society London, where his deeply moving, compelling and thought-provoking book *Fleeing from the Führer, A Postal History of Refugees from the Nazis*, was launched on 8 November 2011.

A special report by Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS, from Berlin and London

William Kaczynski is a most remarkable man. He was born into a Jewish family in Berlin on 23 June 1936. He arrived in England with his family as a refugee from Nazi Germany on 15 July 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September. William was interned along with his mother Edith and younger brother Edward (born in December 1938) for ten months in Rushen Camp on the Isle of Man.

Martin Kaczynski, William's father, despite having been awarded the Iron Cross during the First World War, was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration Camp from November 1938 until January 1939. His wife, William's mother, managed to obtain employment for him in England, together with the necessary documents, work permit and visa, as a ladies hat manufacturer; a profession which fortunately did not require a great knowledge of the English language.

Internment camp

When the mass internment of aliens was introduced in Britain in the middle of 1940, a time when the German invasion of Britain appeared imminent, Martin Kaczynski was again arrested and sent first to Huyton internment camp, near Liverpool, and from there to the Isle of Man, where he was placed in Onchan Camp, Douglas.

Edith Kaczynski was also interned with her two small sons, William and Edward, in the

women's camp on the Isle of Man's southern peninsula, based around Port Erin and Port St Mary. The women's camp was collectively known as Rushen Camp. The family remained in internment for ten months until they were released on 25 March 1941. William Kaczynski was four years old at the time.

Postal history

After the War, William Kaczynski worked in London as a ladies hat manufacturer and subsequently started his own successful

Helga Wertheimer, whose identity document and card are pictured on the front cover *Fleeing from the Führer*, pictured during the book launch. All pictures by Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS unless otherwise stated



Memorable event

It was a memorable event, attended by William's wife Marian and their three daughters, Nicole, Tania, and Martine, to whom he dedicated the book. His younger brother Edward and many friends from the Jewish community in London and further afield, some of whom had been interned during the War, were also there for the occasion.

As a result of inadequate medical care offered to Jews in Germany at the time, Edward was left partially paralysed after an accident during his birth. It was a privilege to talk to him at the Royal after the book launch.



It was particularly interesting to meet Helga Wertheimer (now Bellenger), whose United Kingdom identity document No 6165 and Red Cross label are shown on the front cover of the book. Helga, then aged nine, fled Vienna as a child refugee on the eve of the War, wearing the number 6165 around her neck. Her father perished in Auschwitz.

The President of the Royal, Brian Trotter RDP, FRPSL, and two Past Presidents were also present at the book launch — Gavin Fryer RDP, FRPSL, and David Beech FRPSL, Head of the British Library Philatelic Collections, who contributed the Foreword to the book.

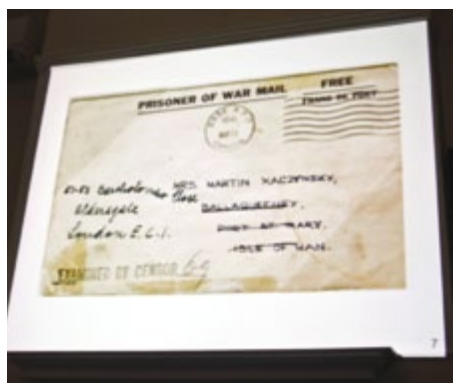
The Stuart Rossiter Trust

Fleeing From The Führer was produced with the generous assistance of the Stuart Rossiter Trust, a charitable trust supporting research and publication relating to the history of communication through postal systems of the world.

During his short speech, David Tett FRPSL, a Trustee, emphasised that *Fleeing from the Führer* was an important piece of both social and philatelic history. He said: 'This was the first book that the Trust had assisted with that had been published by a non-philatelic publisher — The History Press.'

Information about the Stuart Rossiter Trust on the last page of the book concludes: 'We hope this book will bring postal history to an audience that has perhaps not even heard of the subject, let alone knows anything about it.'

William Kaczynski spoke movingly about the book and showed some of the covers and postcards from his collections built during the past 20 years that are illustrated in it.



The cover that started William Kaczynski on his collection more than 20 years ago

Co-author

William Kaczynski introduced his co-author, Charmian Brinson, Professor of German Studies at Imperial College, London, who gave some of the background to a most successful project.

David Beech, FRPSL, also spoke about how he had encouraged and helped William Kaczynski from the conception of an idea to the beautifully produced book, copies of which were piled-up on a near-by table for guests to purchase and have signed by the author and co-author.

Setting the scene

In his Foreword, David Beech FRPSL vividly set the scene. He wrote: 'Something of William Kaczynski's story is told in the pages of this book and it is the story of millions



William Kaczynski pictured during the launch of *Fleeing From The Führer*, with left to right: David Beech FRPSL, Head of the Philatelic Collections, The British Library, Brian Trotter RDP, FRPSL, President, the Royal Philatelic Society London, and Professor Charmian Brinson, co-author

of others fleeing or attempting to flee from the Führer. The similarities are all too clear but where William's story is special is that it is illustrated with the very letters, cards, envelopes, documents and ephemera that record and prove these events in his life and that of his brother, his parents and wider family.'

He continued: 'While philatelic material has been used before to illustrate the Nazi period, it has never been used in quite the same way as here for a chiefly non-philatelic audience and offers perhaps a fresh way to demonstrate in personal terms such momentous events.'

The Isle of Man

David Beech added: 'I have been struck by the account of the various internment camps on the Isle of Man and elsewhere. While conditions were far from ideal, those held there made a community with entertainments, education and indeed the publication of camp newspapers. Fortunately the stay for most was comparatively short and many would join in the fight against the Führer and subsequently make important contributions to national life, in business, in culture and in politics.'

A most convivial evening ended with a buffet reception and wine held in the ground-floor libraries.

Unique collection

Fleeing from the Führer is a unique collection of correspondence during the Second World War between refugees in internment camps worldwide and with those incarcerated in German Prisoner of War Camps. These remarkable stories are told for the first time, illustrated with 150 colour images from the superb collection meticulously formed by William Kaczynski.

The list of contents provides an indication of the wider range of material included by William Kaczynski and his co-author: 'The Rise of National Socialism and its Consequences for the Jewish Population

in Germany during the 1930's; Emigration from Germany and Austria; The Wartime Occupation of Continental Europe; Refugee Life and Alien Internment in Britain; Deportation from Britain: Internment Camps in Australia and Canada; Internment Camps Worldwide; Undercover Mail in Wartime; People Who Made a Difference; The Aftermath: Displaced Persons.'

Fleeing from the Führer is an important reference work and valuable addition to philatelic, and non-philatelic libraries throughout the world; it concludes with useful chapter notes, a bibliography and an index.



The Berlin Wall pictured during September 2011

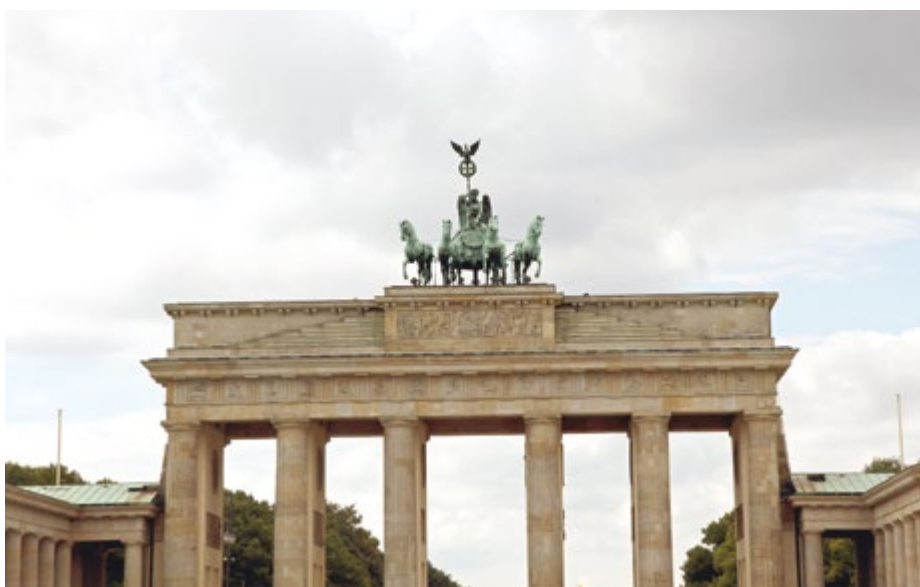
Berlin August 2011

It was late August 2011; David Beech FRPSL and I flew to the vibrant capital of Germany, to attend the official opening of a spectacular exhibition, 'The Blue Mauritius: Meeting of the Queens in Berlin', and a one day symposium, 'Blue Mauritius'. (The editor has invited me to contribute a feature article about them in the March 2012 issue of *GSM*).

Neither of us had visited Berlin before and William Kaczynski enthusiastically offered to show us some of the well-known landmarks in the city before our engagement at the Berlin Museum of Communications (the former 'Imperial Postal Museum').



Left: William Kaczynski pictured at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, also known as the Holocaust Memorial, Berlin



The Brandenburg Gate, a former city gate, is one of the most well-known landmarks of Berlin and Germany

It was an action-packed three-day tour that began each day after breakfast from our hotel conveniently located across the street from the Museum. William Kaczynski took us first to the nearby Checkpoint Charlie.

The Berlin Wall

I vividly remember listening to the wireless news bulletins on 13 August 1961, during the Cold War, as Soviet soldiers, backed by tanks, placed barriers and barbed wire to stop people crossing from the East into West Berlin. The infamous Berlin Wall was built — a 155 km barrier enclosing West Berlin. During the next nearly 30 years many brave people were shot or bled to death as they unsuccessfully attempted to flee from the repressive Soviet regime in East Berlin and the GDR. It was not until 9 November 1989 that the Berlin Wall was breached and the re-unification of German began!

William Kaczynski rented a car and took us to the block of flats that his family owned in East Berlin. It was taken over when the Berlin Wall was built. After reunification it took another seven years of complex and persistent negotiations before the block of flats was finally transferred back into the family's possession.

We then visited part of the Berlin Wall that had been left as a memorial. It was profoundly moving to stand on both sides and look along the length of concrete decorated with colourful graffiti on the West side. This was in stark contrast to the huge plain concrete sheets on the East side of the wall where barbed wire and other obstacles had been placed to keep people away!

Brandenburg Gate

We saw the world famous Brandenburg Gate and had lunch in the restaurant situated at the top of the Reichstag building from where there is a wonderful panoramic view of Berlin. I paused for a moment and remembered that Hugh Jefferies, Editor of *GSM*, was born in Berlin during the Berlin Airlift in May 1948.

Indelible impression

It was both a privilege and a pleasure to spend a few days in Berlin with William Kaczynski. I am extremely grateful for the insights, the indelible impression Berlin made on me and in particular for his most generous hospitality. Parking spaces simply appeared when we needed them. 'It's just for William', he said on several occasions.

The Isle of Man

Postscript: William Kaczynski and members of his family have returned to the Isle of Man and visited the places where they were interned during the Second World War.

Interestingly from a philatelic perspective, Isle of Man Stamps & Coins issued a special set of eight stamps (*se-tenant*) and a miniature sheet, on 8 August 2011 to document the postal history of the Knockaloe Internment Camp on the Isle of Man during the First World War.

Background notes provided with the stamps stated: 'For the duration of the First World War there were two large camps on the Island: a requisitioned holiday camp in Douglas, holding some 3000 internees, and Knockaloe, a mile south of Peel, which was purpose-built using refabricated huts and included its own railway link. Almost 24,000 men classified as 'enemy aliens' were detained at Knockaloe with a military and civilian workforce of around 3000 individuals looking after them.'

GSM asked Dot Tilbury, General Manager of Isle of Man Stamps & Coins, if there were any plans to issue a set of stamps depicting life in internment camps on the island during the Second World War, including Rushen Camp. Mrs Tilbury replied by email: 'So far we have featured only WW1 internment camps in two of our issues, specifically Internment Art and Internment Postal History. As this is an on-going series we are looking at different aspects of the camps of both World Wars but at present we are at the research stage so nothing has been finalised.'



Fleeing from the Führer, A Postal History of Refugees from the Nazis, by Charmian Brinson & William Kaczynski, was published by The History Press, during November 2011 (Hardback, 191 pages, Price £17.99).