

# Germany/ England: inside/outside\*

David Cast

I am interested here in tracing a topic in the history of a number of German scholars who fled to Britain in the years after Hitler's rise to power. Much of the history of this exodus after the passing of the so-called Nuremberg Laws in 1935 and 1936 is familiar, as is also the general record of the influence they exerted in so many fields of study in the country they came to. Necessarily less has been recorded of the more personal experiences of these exiles – for some exile was a favoured term, rather than refugee – or how, as scholars, they adjusted to the intellectual and social conditions of the intellectual culture of Britain that they found themselves in.<sup>1</sup> It is the record of this adjustment or accommodation, if such we can also call it, that I am

\* I have many people to thank in writing this essay. First and foremost is Geraldine Johnson who invited me to be part of a session 'Expatriate Histories of Art in the Twentieth Century', at the meeting of the College Art Association in New York in February, 2013. Her support and encouragement for this project has been extremely important. I should note that the text here was essentially completed in 2016.

I would also like to thank for their help, Robin Woolven, Elizabeth Sears, Carol Duncan, John Mitchell, Allison Levy and then my colleagues at Bryn Mawr College with whom I have discussed this topic; Barbara Lane, A. A. Donohue, Dale Kinney, Christiane Hertel, Steven Levine, Michael Krausz and Lisa Saltzman. And for her technical help, Meg Hankel. Much of my understanding of the more personal historical issues here is based on conversations with Margot Wittkower and also the material in *Partnership and Discovery: Margot and Rudolf Wittkower*, Margot Wittkower interviewed by Teresa Barnett, Art History Documentation Project, compiled under the auspices of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994. Also important is the article V. Newhouse, 'Margot Wittkower: Design Education and Practice, Berlin: London, 1919-39' *Journal of Design History*, 3, 1990, 83-101. The comments of Ernst Gombrich, cited throughout this essay, come from the following sources: 'The Exploration of Culture Contacts: the Services to Scholarship of Otto Kurz (1908-75)', in *Tributes: Interpreters of our Cultural Tradition*, Ithaca N.Y, Cornell University Press, 1984, 235-250; 'The Warburg Institute: a Personal Memoir', *The Art Newspaper*, 2 November 1990, 9; 'An Autobiographical Sketch' in *The Essential Gombrich*, ed. Richard Woodfield: London: Phaidon, 1996, 21-36. Also to be noted for giving a sense of the intellectual atmosphere at the Warburg Institute in the 1950s are the reminiscences of Michael Baxandall, *Episodes; a Memorybook*, London: Francis Lincoln limited, 2010. Biographies of the historians mentioned here are easily accessible in U. Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil*, Munich: Saur, 1999.

<sup>1</sup> For these terms see M. Berghahn, *Continental Britons: German-Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany*, New York: Berghahn Books, New York, 2007, 177; Hannah Arendt preferred other descriptions, immigrants, newcomers, as noted in Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler Émigrés: the Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2002, xviii.

concerned with here and about the scholars trained as historians of art in order to reconstruct the events they lived through and how, amidst the horrors of a war that threatened both their new home and the previous world they had known so well, these experiences affected what, as scholars, they did. To speak of such matters is to venture on an enquiry that is at once intellectual and yet personal and perhaps, in that last regard, presumptuous. But the personal is always part of what we might call public history. And my interest in these matters stems from my own experiences that may excuse any my intrusiveness; that I grew up in London in the aftermath of the war with the images of the destruction of the city so firm in my memory that they are with me still; and that later, as a graduate student at Columbia University in the 1960s, I had the privilege to study with several of these scholars and talk to them, if briefly, about their memories of those terrible events in Britain and beyond.



Figure 1 Holland House Burned: Historic England Archive BB83 04456.

This is then in part a study of anecdotes. And to introduce the tenor of this enquiry I begin with details of two distinct and poignant events that accompany this history. The first (fig. 1) is a photograph of the library of Holland House in West London shortly after a massive air raid on September 27, 1940 that destroyed the building and so many of its contents.<sup>2</sup> This is a curious scene, perhaps staged as

<sup>2</sup> For instances of the publication of this photograph see *Britain under Fire*, London: Country Life, 1941, 30; *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, edited J. M. Richards, London: The Architectural Press, 1940. 73. For the clearance of bombed buildings see Robin Woolven, 'Between Destruction and Reconstruction: London's Debris Clearance and Repair

propaganda after the event, to be printed, as it was, in a number of war-time publications. But whatever its original purpose, it can serve as an image of the destruction unleashed upon London and on so many of the cultural properties; Holland House, it might be noted, was never fully rebuilt. But to this image I can add a particular note; that Rudolf Wittkower, speaking of his life in London during the war, told me that sometimes he was required to go into such places after a bombing raid and decide – ignoring all else, including the wounded – what needed to be saved. This, as he said, was not easy. To which may be added another small but remarkable detail; that since he was very large, it is recorded that, when fire watching at night, he was able to stamp out the fuses of the incendiary devices falling all around.<sup>3</sup>

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
COURTAULD INSTITUTE OF ART  
20 PORTMAN SQ., LONDON, W.1  
WELBECK, 1386-9  
(12 LINES)

I came to know Dr. Hugo Buchthal about three years ago when I was working in the Warburg Institute. Since he came to England Dr. Buchthal has been engaged on work of great importance to the history of art and was till recently working in the relations of Islamic and Byzantine art. He is a person who would be counted on to behave on all occasions with perfect loyalty to this country.

Anthony Blunt  
4.8.40  
Deputy Director.

Figure 2 Anthony Blunt, Letter (1940), Oxford, Bodleian Library SPSL 185, as from *Refugee Scholars, Conversations with Tess Simpson*, ed. R. M. Cooper, Leeds: Moorland Books, 1992, 115.

And then this; a letter from the same year, 1940 (fig. 2) written to the Home Office by Anthony Blunt, attesting to the loyalty of the art historian Hugo Buchthal.<sup>4</sup>

---

Organization, 1939-1945', in *The Blitz and its Legacy*, edited Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham, Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2013, 61-72.

<sup>3</sup> For the story of Wittkower and the fuses, see Anna Nyberg, *Émigrés: the transformation of Art Publishing in Britain*, London: Phaidon, 2014, 72.

<sup>4</sup> For this letter of Blunt (Oxford, The Bodleian Library, SPSL, 185) see *Refugee Scholars, conversations with Tess Simpson*, ed. R. M. Cooper, Leeds: Moorland Books, 1992, 115. Buchthal later worked as a librarian at the Warburg Institute from 1941-43 and as lecturer at University College, London 1944-45. On the policy of internment see F. Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens (1940)*, reprinted London: Libris, 1980, 8.

Such testimony was necessary because in the aftermath of the invasion of Denmark and Norway in April of that year it was decided, under the supervision of the Swinton Committee, that all male aliens in England should be interned, as indeed many were, in camps near Liverpool or on the Isle of Man. Among those rounded up – and I speak here only of the art historians - were Nikolaus Pevsner, Otto Pächt, William Hecksher, Ludwig Münz, Leopold Ettlinger, Otto Benesch and Johannes Wilde. This policy of internment was pointless and immediately criticized and was indeed ended the following year; for there was never any question of the loyalty the refugees felt towards Britain – among aliens, as can be imagined, there were very few supporters of Hitler - as attested here in the last sentence that Blunt wrote; that 'he (Buchthal) is someone who could be counted on to behave on all occasions with perfect loyalty to this country'.

Yet such a comment, as we now know, was written by Blunt at the very time he was passing on information to Soviet Intelligence when, after the German-Soviet pact of 1939, Britain and the Soviet Union were in a state of open war. Again to add a personal note; that Margot Wittkower told me that when at last in 1979 Blunt's espionage was revealed, she felt never so personally betrayed by anyone at any time, since both she and her husband owed a deep gratitude to the country where they had found refuge. All through the war Blunt had come to their house, helping Rudolf Wittkower with his English and, in turn, learning from Wittkower what it was to study the history of art in a rigorous and historically grounded way. This closeness was acknowledged by Blunt when he wrote a letter to Margot, after her husband died, describing him as 'my only master...you know how much I admired and loved him'. Another detail; that when, in their last conversation, she asked Blunt how he had managed to live a life of such deception, dining with the Queen and, as she put it, travelling with people of a class he wished to destroy, Blunt merely pointed to the glass of whisky that he was holding. With this, he said, and more work and more work.<sup>5</sup>

These are differing details from the personal histories of those living in those terrible years but it is from such records, intimate as they are, that might be possible to recover some account of the personal situations of these scholars during the war. Yet, as Ernst Gombrich put it, speaking later of his experiences in London, it was hard to recapture, let alone convey later to others, what they felt at that time and then the anxieties they harboured for those left behind in Germany. For some, silence was the only response; for others the very fact of their own safety, when so many others had not escaped, was to haunt them for the rest of their lives. Nor was it ever easy, as Gombrich noted, to watch the destruction of the countries they had left; he could not rejoice, as he said, when German cities were bombed, but it had to be. In Britain, while the nation was surviving, they were at least safe, a point later

<sup>5</sup> For this comment by Blunt, see M. Carter, *Anthony Blunt: his Lives*, London: Macmillan, 2001, 211. It is interesting to note that Wittkower always pronounced Milan to rhyme with Dylan, something he picked up from Blunt, which, according to one comment, was merely an antique affectation on Blunt's part; see Carter, *Blunt*, 371.

emphasized by the fact that several of them – this they would not have been known until after the war – had been listed in the Nazi Black Book, compiled by Walter Schellenberg, the head of the office of German counter-espionage, to be taken after the invasion into what was called protective custody.<sup>6</sup>

At the personal level, there was much immediately to endear so many of the refugees to their new lives; as one exile put it, when he passed a policeman on the street playing with a cat, he knew this was a country could live in. And Karl Popper recalls that he marvelled at the milk bottles left out on the doorsteps, desperately impoverished as London was, since he was sure that in Vienna where he came from they would have been stolen. All this stood as a deep contrast to the lives they had left; indeed Margot Wittkower mentioned an episode on an outing in the Brandenburg woods when she and her husband encountered armed Nazis and their menacing police dogs. Yet, despite its security, life in England was not easy and many of these exiles, whatever their situations, were never completely comfortable in their new home. For others, as Walter Gropius put it rather sharply, Britain might be merely a stopping over place, 'nur ein Aufenthaltsplatz', even though he had received one or two commissions in England for buildings. Something of the cultural distance they felt between Germany and Austria and Britain was noted by Gombrich, even if he remained in the country all his life and was richly honoured for his contributions to its culture. Yet, thinking back, he would say that he never felt truly English, but rather that he was still a central European who lived in England. But, as he then added immediately, the generosity with which so many refugees were received and supported could never be sufficiently appreciated.<sup>7</sup>

How far such difficulties and conflicts were reflected in the lives of these scholars is not easy to describe but it is very probable, as we will see, that the private and public conditions they found themselves affected what they did in their work. There were many private and professional problems to be faced, and if economic conditions in Germany and Austria had been harsh, these exiles, whatever the positions they had had before, were now in a country in almost equal disarray, the Slump having left its traces everywhere, sharply limiting the opportunities for new professional lives. Often the refugees in the sciences could find some position to

<sup>6</sup> For a comment on inclusion in the Nazi Black Book, see S. Harris, *Nikolaus Pevsner: the Life*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2011, 259. Beyond Pevsner the other art historians included were F. Antal, O. Benesch, G. Bing, O. Brendel, P. Jacobsthal, E. Kantorowicz, A. Katzenellenbogen, H. Rosenau, F. Saxl, E. Wind, R. Wittkower. For one example of a sad response to having escaped see the comment of P. O. Kristeller in a letter he wrote to Eugenio Garin from New York in 1944, speaking of his 'undeserved almost shameful tranquility' during the war; see R. Rubini, *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel & Heidegger*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, 311. Both of Kristeller's parents died in Theresienstadt. And also see, in the case of Pevsner, S. Harris, *Pevsner*, 252.

<sup>7</sup> For the story of the policeman and the kitten, see Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, 80; and for Popper and the milk bottles, J. Watkins, 'Karl Raimund Popper, 1902-1994', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 94, 1997, 652.

continue their activities within the war work. Others, if not attached to the academy, might also find places to live and work, if sometimes in conditions sharply distant from those they were accustomed to. Perhaps Hampstead, that artistic and thoughtful little suburb, as E. M Forster called it, might remind them of the Tiergarten in Berlin. Indeed many of the refugees moved there, to a neighbourhood near the newly founded Belsize Square Synagogue where there were newly opened delicatessens with exotic foods and a restaurant like the Cosmo in Swiss Cottage – Freud’s favourite - which would survive long after the war. Yet for others, especially those who had difficulties finding situations for themselves, Britain, for all the refuge it offered, did not seem immediately attractive, a cold, foggy country, as one person put it, drab and poor in its appearance. And many, marked by a deep sadness and bitterness at their betrayal in Germany, felt strained and distant in their relationships with their English neighbours. Some too, understandably enough, suffered from insecurities that led to an arrogance that did not endear them to those trying to be of assistance.

And what of England itself? The national character of the British, to quote one refugee, was unpredictable, impenetrable and un-extreme and if this could make living in such a culture somewhat easier, what was missed often was a sense of closeness; that, as another exile put it – and here we can think back to Gombrich - that she was always with the English but not of the English. And if British culture was more generally defined by such images as Anglicanism, cricket, pubs and the monarchy, there was no easy or immediate place within it for these exiles. What might be said, recognising their Jewishness and the facts of their past lives, was to speak of what could be defined by what was spoken of as a continentalness – a term not to stay in the language - this, once acknowledged, allowing them a measure of peace and repose. For some of them, whatever their particular interests and however marginally they were able to establish themselves, they managed by this idea to feel a certain intellectual solidarity together that served to defend them against all else they had to face.<sup>8</sup>

Immediately, of course, there was the problem of language; as Margot Wittkower put it, in a sweetly social way, she could read Shakespeare but she could not order a pair of gloves. And it is touching to see how hard Pevsner, even though he had been in England since 1930, struggled in these first years to improve his accent.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps, as Fritz Saxl once put it so sharply, English was impossible to learn. Yet in time many of these refugees became fully comfortable in their new language, as the examples of Nicolas Pevsner and Gombrich and Wittkower showed; indeed Wittkower’s volume on Italian Baroque art was to receive a

<sup>8</sup> For the Belsize Square Synagogue and also for Hampstead as a little Vienna, or Finchleystrasse, see Snowman, *Hitler Émigrés*, 99, 227. Also A. Alvarez, *Where did it all go right?*, London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999, 63; and for the importance of the neighbourhood, and then the idea of continentalness see Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, 27, 214-45.

<sup>9</sup> For Pevsner and his accent see Harris, *Pevsner*, 226

particular prize for the quality of his writing. But some were silenced, the change of language being insurmountable. Yet for others the structure of the English language required them – for some, they admitted, this was salutary – to take a different and more practical approach to abstraction and to the language of ideas.<sup>10</sup> For historians of art, there was another local problem, that little in Britain matched the philosophical and historical ambitions so long part of German art history, of that *Kunstwissenschaft*, a term, as Edgar Wind noted, that was essentially untranslatable. There was, of course, a tradition of antiquarianism and connoisseurship in Britain that for centuries had enriched the museums and private collections with objects from all corners of the earth. But of the history of art, at a more philosophical level, there was very little, though it had been possible for students at the Slade School of Fine Arts at University College, London – as did my father - to attend lectures on the history of art by Tancred Borenius, a Finnish art historian and the first holder of the Durning-Lawrence Chair, established in 1922 by the head of the Slade, Henry Tonks.<sup>11</sup>

In immediately practical ways, several organisations were established to help these academic refugees, as they were called – here Lord Beveridge was a leading figure – as in with 1933 the Academic Assistance Council, renamed in 1936 as the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. But such bodies, well intentioned though they were, worked on shoe-string budgets and the opportunities they could offer for those beyond the sciences were very limited. This was especially true for historians of art and when Esther Simpson, who worked so vigorously for these organizations, began to classify scholars by field, she admitted that she did not recognize the history of art as a category; in the end, in a first report, she listed nineteen art historians, labelled by her as workers in the field of art. Beyond this, of course, there was always also a wider political context facing everyone, that as Herbert Read the editor of the *Burlington Magazine* put it in 1939, contributions to what he called the free development of culture – and this now included the history

<sup>10</sup> For the need to change ways of thinking, see the comments of Erwin Panofsky and Popper, cited in Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, 81-82; Popper spoke of the forced change as being traumatic but bracing, explaining it thus. 'My main trouble was to write in acceptable English. I had written a few things before, but they were linguistically very bad. My German style in *Logic der Forschung* had been reasonably light for German readers; but I discovered that English standards of writing were utterly different, and far higher than German standards. For example, no German reader minds polysyllables. In English one has to learn to be repelled by them. But if one is still fighting to avoid the simplest mistakes, such higher aims are far more distant, however much one might approve of them'. K. Popper, *Unended Quest. An Intellectual Autobiography*, London: Open Court Press, 1976, 114. And for the general responses to living in England and the idea of an Englishness see Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, 121-173 and Snowman, *Hitler Émigrés*, 142, 238. The fact of the little contact with English Jews is noted in Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, 154.

<sup>11</sup> For Borenius and his place in English life see J. Vakkari, 'Alcuni contemporanei finlandesi di Lionello Venturi: Osvald Siren, Tancred Borenius, Onni Okkonen', *Storia dell'Arte*, 101, 2002, 108-17.

of art – were welcome in that publication but the will and energy of the nation was to be given a single scope: the achievement of material victory.<sup>12</sup>

It was amidst such ever changing economic and intellectual contexts that the Warburg Institute had arrived in London in 1933, in the earliest years of the crisis in Germany.<sup>13</sup> The history of the institution itself is generally familiar; that after Aby Warburg returned from Florence to Hamburg in 1902, he built up a collection of books, his laboratory as he called it, for the study of what he described as the expression of the thought of mankind in all its constant and changing aspects. In time this library, the personal and passionate creation of one man, as it has been described, became, after the establishment in 1918 of the University of Hamburg, part of that larger institution. And in 1927 the Warburg family showed their support for the whole enterprise by establishing a foundation to fund it, the 'Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg'. Warburg died in 1929, by which time the library had grown to more than 50,00 books. But by then the economic and political events in Germany were becoming deeply disturbing – Margot Wittkower mentioned that early on she and her husband had read *Mein Kampf*, recognizing its message and they both had unpleasant encounters with armed Nazis – and by 1932

<sup>12</sup> For a general account of the refugee programme see W. Adams, 'The Refugee Scholars of the 1930s', *The Political Quarterly*, 39, 1968, 7-14. And more specifically, *Refugee Scholars*, 197; where the list of those noted, with W indicating the Warburg Institute, ran as follows, G. Bing (W), Buchthal (W), W. Cohn (W), A. Heimann (W), J. Hess (W), E. Hoffmann, B. Kurth (W), O. Kurz (W), H. Meier (W) (killed in action), L Muenz, O. Paecht (W), N. Pevsner, L. van Puyvelde, H. Rosenau, F. Saxl (W), A. Scharf (W), J. Wilde, R. Wittkower (W). For the comment of Read, see H. Read, 'To the Readers of 'The Burlington Magazine'', *The Burlington Magazine*, LXXV, 1939, 179

<sup>13</sup> For this account of the Warburg Institute see the following: generally N. Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953, 42-47; K. Clark, *Another part of the wood*, London: Harper & Row, 1974, 207-08; see also, for Clark's early interest in Warburg, M. C. Potter, 'Breaking the shell of the humanist egg: Kenneth Clark's University of London lectures on German art historians', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 11, 2014, 1-34; D. Wuttke, 'Die Emigration der Kunstwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg und die Anfänge des Universitätsfaches Kunstgeschichte in Grossbritannien', *Artibus et Historiae*, 5, 1984, 133-146; D. McEwan, 'A Tale of One Institute and Two Cities: The Warburg Institute', *The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, 1, 1999, p. 25-42. C. Gibson-Woods, 'Raymond Klibansky and the Warburg Institute', *Revue d'art canadienne*, XXVII, 2000, 137-139; N. Mann, 'Two-Way Traffic: the Warburg Institute as a Microcosm of Cultural Exchange between Britain and Europe, in *The British Contribution to the Europe of the Twenty-First Century*, edited B. Markesinis, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2002, 93-10. E. Sears, 'The Warburg Institute, 1933-1944; A precarious experiment in international collaboration', *Art Libraries Journal*, 38, 2013, p. 7-15. E. Klinger, 'The Warburg Institute: 1933 - 36, in *Übergänge und Verflechtungen Kulturelle Transfers in Europa*, edited G. Kokorz and H. Mittelbauer, Bern: Peter Lang, 2014, 263-80. R. Woodfield, 'The Afterlife of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg: Volume 12', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 15,

Fritz Saxl, now the director, saw that it was to be impossible for the Institute to continue in Germany. Other homes were sought, in Leiden and in Rome; but in July, 1933, two academics from England, W. G. Constable from the newly established Courtauld Institute of Art and C. S. Gibson from Guy's Hospital, travelled to Hamburg – they had been alerted to the situation there by the Academic Assistance Council – and wrote a report to Sir Denison Ross, the Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, strongly suggesting that the Institute move to London. Saxl agreed, even if he was fearful always that Britain would lose the war and the existence of this institution would again be threatened. Much had to be done by many people to bring about the move, including Samuel Courtauld and Lord Lee of Fareham, who, on the advice of Kenneth Clark, was able to persuade the University of London to accept the library, bullying the Hamburg authorities, as Clark described, to send the library over as a personal loan to himself. Miraculously, and smoothly, on December 12, 1933, two ships, the *Jessica* and the *Hermia*, left Hamburg for London, carrying five hundred and thirty one crates, sixty thousand books, many slides and photographs and, as it is recorded, most of the binding machinery and furniture that had been accumulated by Warburg for his Institute. Also accompanying these materials, beyond Saxl and Wind, were four other members of the staff from Hamburg, Gertrud Bing, Eva von Eckhardt, Otto Fein and Hans Meier.

This arrival of the Warburg Institute in London was to mark a special moment in the academic culture of England and especially for the history of art since, however wide Aby Warburg's interests, it was that field of enquiry that was the major focus of his investigations. The first years of the Warburg Institute were marked by wandering, from Thames House on Millbank – this site had been obtained for it by Lord Lee – to the Imperial Institute in South Kensington 1939 and then in 1941, after the librarian Hans Meier was killed, to the safety of 'The Lea' a house in Denham, Buckinghamshire. In 1944, the Warburg family transferred the Institute to the care of the University of London, a move immediately and gratefully recognized and one that would, it was hoped, ensure its permanent survival, financed then, as Gombrich put it, by that most generous of patrons, the English taxpayer. This also meant that any idea, favoured by some in the Warburg family, to move the Institute to the United States, was ended.

The place that the Institute could occupy within the culture of England was carefully managed by Saxl, a pragmatically indomitable figure, as Michael Baxandall once described him. Activities began remarkably quickly and immediately much help was offered to the many displaced scholars – here Gertrud Bing was very generous – who, whether or not she could offer practical assistance, were able by her interest in them to enjoy some measure of comfort. One later visiting scholar spoke of what he called her spirit of friendliness and intellectual seriousness. Saxl always emphasized that the Institute, even among the terrible events of those years, was to serve as a place of serious scholarship. Publications were planned, most notably the *Warburg Journal*, the first volume of which, edited

by Wittkower and Wind, appeared in 1937 with essays by a range of scholars, including Jacques Maritain, Erwin Panofsky, Francis Wormald, Delio Cantimori and Charles Mitchell. And soon after the move to Thames House a series of informal talks was instituted, followed a few months later, in the fall of 1934, by a fuller range of lectures shared equally between Continental and English scholars. It is striking to see the names of those, in many fields, who gave these lectures at the Warburg; Niels Bohr, Ernst Cassirer, Ernst Kris, Johan Huizinga, Henri Focillon, Otto Brendel, Raymond Klibansky, Alexandre Koyré. And all this was done, as was said, to make the idea of *Kulturwissenschaft*, where the history of art was now a fully recognized part, fully understandable to a new audience.

Yet there was more; for if research, so Saxl wrote later in 1947, would always be the main task of the Institute, a vital part of the function of the Warburg Institute was education, the staff being always ready, as he put it, to teach and to help younger students and supervise post-graduate work. Perhaps at the time the Warburg Institute appeared to be a slightly foreign institution but to counter any problems of isolation, Saxl worked tirelessly to form associations with other academic institutions in England. And in ways that were to extend the influence of the Warburg even further, many English scholars, especially those with interests not generally accommodated within the English academic world, were able to find a sympathetic home here; among those welcomed, beyond any previously mentioned, were John Pope-Hennessy, Charles Mitchell, D. G. Gordon, Frances Yates, D. P. Walker and Roger Hinks.

This is, within its limits, a remarkable and successful story of intellectual survival and yet, as we look back, we may wonder always about the more personal experiences of these scholars, living often in poverty often, in horrible bedsitters in Paddington, as Karl Popper remembered of himself and Gombrich. And for all their sense of academic solidarity, we may also question, coming as they did often from very different cultural and political contexts, what the scholars who ended up in London thought of each other, privately and intellectually. Quite clearly, as seen from the outside, the culture of the Warburg could be seen to be noticeably Jewish – though none there were strongly religious – and in its politics obviously and equally anti-Nazi. Perhaps such shared sympathies covered any other political divisions; as Pevsner put it, now we Germans are all socialists. Yet politics, beyond a sense of German nationalism – Saxl during his years fighting on the Italian front had openly supported socialism – had never been a particular focus of interest to Warburg, and if now such matters were a part of the world of the scholars in and around the Warburg Institute, little seems to have been said of such matters in this new context, either as a point of action or of ideas. Here, as a measure – and will see how this worked out for some of the exiles - we can turn back to comments of Margot Wittkower, speaking of her student days in Berlin in 1920; that of course she had read Werner Sombart on socialism and believed, as she put it, that with us everything would change politically. But it was Freud who interested her and her

friends much more, even if then, she added, they refused to have a note pad next to their beds to write down their dreams.

This raises a delicate point; that the art historians who, in their original countries, had been most politically engaged were never especially close to the Warburg. Nor indeed, whatever the reasons, was it easy for these scholars to gain a secure place within the English academic world. One example here would be that of Arnold Hauser who led an impoverished life in Oxford in these years while working on his social history of art until, after its publication, academic positions came his way.<sup>14</sup> So too Frederick Antal who had known Hauser in Budapest when they were both part of the so-called *Sonntagskreis* – together with Johannes Wilde, Georg Lukacs and Karl Mannheim – and, like him, had been involved with the Communist Republic of Bela Kun that fell in 1919. Antal, whom Margot Wittkower described as both a great idealist and a very good art historian, was at first very close to Blunt whose earliest writings on art had been imbued with Marxist sympathies. But Blunt did not offer him a position at the Courtauld Institute, of which in time he was to become director. And Antal, in turn, at least according to Wind, moved further and further away from Blunt, the more he was associated with the Warburg Institute. In the years after the war, when opportunities for employment opened up, some of the refugees were able to find help at London University and at Birkbeck College where, from 1948 onwards, Pevsner was finally employed as a full-time teacher; here one instance would be Suzanne Lang, an architectural historian. During the war Pevsner himself had been forced to turn to other jobs to survive, clearing away damage as a Bevin Boy and, like Wittkower, fire-watching on the roof at Birkbeck College, where, so the story goes, he was able to spend much of the time writing his guide to the history of architecture. Yet for others, especially for women – and Margot Wittkower mentions that Saxl was not sympathetic to them – life was difficult and there were several like Adelheid Heimann and Erna Mandowsky, fine scholars, as she said, who were never able to find positions that allowed them to continue at that time with their work. Another example of such difficulties was Erna Auerbach, an artist from Frankfurt, whose studio was completely destroyed in the bombing. Nothing then was available for her and she went to work for the Women's Voluntary Service until, in 1947, she

<sup>14</sup> On Hauser see *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999, 158-161 and M. R. Orwicz, C. Beauchamps, 'Critical Discourse in the Formation of a Social History of Art: Anglo-American Response to Arnold Hauser,' *Oxford Art Journal*, 8, 1985, 52-62. And now C. Markoja, 'The Young Arnold Hauser and the Sunday Circle: the publication of Hauser's estate preserved in Hungary,' *Journal of Art Historiography*, 21, 2019, 1-20. For Antal, see D. Krohn, 'Antal and his critics: a forgotten chapter in the historiography of the Italian Renaissance in the twentieth century', in *Memory and Oblivion; proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art, Amsterdam 1996*, edited W. Reinink, J. Stumpel, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, 95-101.; and now P. Stirton, 'Frederick Antal and Peter Peri: Art, Scholarship and Social Purpose', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 13, 2012, 207-225.

found a position as visiting lecturer at the London Polytechnic and turned to the history of art, writing a study of artists in Tudor England still seen to be a fundamental and important work.<sup>15</sup>

The accommodations the refugee scholars could make with their new intellectual and social contexts took various forms. Quite obviously many of them were cut off from the materials within continental Europe that they had worked with before and it was an easy consequence, as the examples of Pevsner and Wittkower show so well, that they turned their attention to the history of the country they now lived in. Their personal circumstances, we can note, were different for Wittkower's parents had left Germany in 1938 and, after his father died, his mother moved to Argentina to be near relatives. Pevsner's parents were not so fortunate; his father died in 1939 and his mother committed suicide in 1942 when about to be deported, something he learned from a Christian friend still in Germany that left him burdened with a feeling of guilt over his own safety. Both Pevsner and Wittkower lived in or near Hampstead, happily placed in that picturesque part of London. Both worked exceptionally hard – here we might think of what Blunt had said about own his life - and both were prodigiously productive; indeed Pevsner's industriousness became a point of wonder, even amusement, for all who knew him. Wittkower for all his gregariousness and the time he spent with his students, led a simple life; when alone, as Howard Hibbard put it, he worked. Both were also fortunate to be able to form close associations with English scholars whose interests matched their own, Wittkower notably with John Summerson and Pevsner with Alec Clifton-Taylor, an expert on building materials. Neither had any contact with Jewish organizations in England for if, in the United States, such bodies were more concerned with the intellectual activities of the refugees there, in England no such interest emerged.

The first project Wittkower was able to work on, together with Tancred Borenius, was a catalogue of the drawings in the collection of Sir Robert Mond, a task that nicely drew on the British tradition of collecting and connoisseurship and all that Wittkower knew from his work in Rome on the drawings of Bernini.<sup>16</sup> Yet he had always a deep interest in the architecture and if, as Margot Wittkower said, they were both dispirited when first looking at the buildings of London, the Queen Anne houses, being merely facades, as she put it, with holes for windows and nothing else. But in time she and her husband came to think more critically about the history of architecture at that moment, focusing on Lord Burlington and the relationship between his neo-Palladianism – this was then a new term – and the theories and buildings of the Italian architects, most obviously Palladio, whom Wittkower so deeply admired. The first result of this new interest was an article published in 1943 on the transformation of Italian motifs within XVIIIth century

<sup>15</sup> On Adelheim and other Women scholars at this time see Christine von Oertzen, *Science, Gender and Internationalism*, 1917-55, tr. Kate Turge, London: Palgrave 2012, 161-64

<sup>16</sup> For the Mond collection: T. Borenius, R. Wittkower, *Catalogue of the collection of drawings by the old Masters formed by Sir Robert Mond*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1938.

English architecture and this ushered in a new way to examine the theory and practice of architecture, a topic mainly considered before, if at all, only by antiquarians or historians. This essay was followed by a series of studies, later brought together in a publication in 1949, that considered the theories of architecture in Italy from the time of Alberti to Palladio, a subject, even during the war, that Wittkower was able to study from all the texts held at the Warburg. This, despite its focus on Italy, confirmed for many scholars in England the value of such a rigorous approach to the general history of architecture and came to represent for a fuller audience of architects and historians alike a new account of the meaning of architecture and new ways of writing about architectural history.

The activities of Nikolaus Pevsner took another route. He had first come to England in 1930 in response to an invitation to give a series of lectures on English art at the University of Göttingen, after his first love of Leipzig Baroque, a subject he had been attracted to from his interest in William Morris, C. F. A. Voysey and the tradition of Arts and Crafts. But he never saw himself as a scholar in the model of Wittkower or Saxl and his approach to the history of art and architecture was, at least in his own eyes, always more practical. On certain aspects of the history of the arts in English he wrote a number of theoretical essays that were rich and are important still. But after the disruption of the war years and with the help of the publisher Allan Lane who had established the Penguin Press in 1936, he began two new important projects, both based on models he knew in Germany, both of which in their differing ways confirmed a new kind of art historical activity in England.<sup>17</sup> The first was the series entitled *The Buildings of England*, based both on English guide-books, county by county, and also, and importantly, on the *Handbuch der deutschen Kunstdenkmäler* by Georg Dehio. The other was the Pelican History of Art, based on the *Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft*, which became a series to which many of his colleagues and friends were to contribute, Rudolf Wittkower, John Summerson, Anthony Blunt and Otto Brendel.

Other exiled scholars, in this new context, also turned to English topics in other ways, as did Antal with his studies of William Hogarth and Fuseli, as also did Francis Klingender – he, though born in Goslar, Germany, was partly of English heritage – with his volume on Hogarth and his significant study of the art of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

There was yet another area for these scholars to work – Wittkower had been there first – among the various collections of drawings preserved in England, above all those in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. The earliest of these studies, laid out with full scholarly rigour, was that of Kenneth Clark on the drawings of

<sup>17</sup> For Pevsner and Lane, see S. Harris, *Pevsner*, 381-83, 562; also E. O. Evans, 'The voice of art history: Nikolaus Pevsner's work for the B.B.C', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 13, 2015, 1-7.

<sup>18</sup> See for Antal, his two posthumous publications, *Fuseli Studies*, London: Routledge and Paul, 1956, *Hogarth and his Place in European Art*, London: Routledge and Paul, 1962; and then F. Klingender, *Hogarth and English Caricature*, London: Transatlantic Arts, 1944, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, London: Noel Carrington, 1947.



never to bother, to feel or think or see'.<sup>19</sup> It was also the case, in a manner of which Saxl could approve, that a part of the influence of these two scholars, Wittkower and Pevsner, stemmed from their other public activities. Pevsner was to travel the length and breadth of England, lecturing and tracking buildings; and, as I know from personal experience, he was a very engaging speaker. Wittkower had offered a course on Michelangelo at the Courtauld Institute as early as 1934. And when, in 1949, he was appointed to the Durning-Lawrence Chair at University College, London – the chair Borenius had held - he lectured there on architecture and architectural theory, accepting also, even if with some hesitation, an invitation from the artist William Coldstream, the head of the Slade School of Fine Arts, to speak weekly to the art students there. For them, he chose to focus on objects from the museums of London, the result being, in the memories of two artists who attended, Andrew Forge and Bernard Cohen, unforgettable examples of what history could do to the appreciation of art.<sup>20</sup>

And yet, as we look back now, it is clear that, that amidst all this activity, the work of these scholars was defined by certain limits in its scope. There was always more in their interests than merely an antiquarian or strictly historical focus and they were willing to speak of the context of works of art in ways far more wide-ranging - philosophical even - than those found traditionally in the history of art in England. Yet this they did, for the most part avoiding any fuller generalizations in the history of art or, more noticeably, anything truly political. To that extent, for all the traditions of German art history with which they were familiar, these scholars, deliberately or not, chose to remove themselves from some of them and to become, as Gombrich put it, speaking of himself, run-away Hegelians. As it happened, we might see that this form of pragmatism, if based on personal preferences, served them very well in the amalgamation, as Saxl put it once, between German methods and the English way of scholarship. There is a point to be made here that could be made more generally about English intellectual life; that if, like all such practices, it was defined by what might be called an intelligentsia, this group, coming as it so often had from a particular social class, was defined by an essential cohesion, avoiding thereby any notions of revolution or rebellion of the kind of experiences seen in the rest of Europe. Such a tradition could have its triumphs; yet for this reason, England, having had its revolution centuries earlier, was clearly marked off from the political experiences of continental Europe, the continuous occupations and civil wars and revolutions, and the intellectual explorations that followed. Perhaps many of these scholars, escaping from Germany, felt a certain relief from the political, even seeing, at a more profound level, the idea of talking in such collectives, as Gombrich put it, as weakening resistance to what he called

<sup>19</sup> For this comment on Wittkower, D. Talbot-Rice, *Historical Review*, 62, 1947, 241-3; and then for Pevsner and Betjeman, T. Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman versus Pevsner*, London: John Murray, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> For these recollections, *Bernard Cohen; Paintings and Drawings 1959-71*, London, 1972, 5 and for Forge, British Library, National Life Stories, ICD0340815.

totalitarian habits of mind. But such preferences, whether consciously or deliberately chosen, allowed some scholars – and note the problems for Antal and Hauser - to take their place all the more easily within the culture they found in England.<sup>21</sup>

And yet of course, as historians, both Pevsner and Wittkower, spoke of ideas and this was easily recognised. Indeed, as Arnaldo Momigliano noted - and he lived in Oxford during the war in that particularly closed academic world - if you mentioned the word idea you were immediately given the address of the Warburg Institute in London.<sup>22</sup> But for Momigliano the nature of the ideas encountered there and at University College, London, its neighbour, defined a particular form of intellectual practice and one by which he hoped to revive or, as he put it, take back from the Germans a strain within the history of ideas that, as a student in Turin in the 1920s, he had associated with several pragmatic English writers. Here Momigliano especially admired the historian George Grote whose history of Greece, published between 1846 and 1856 was so important, or then the work of William Lecky or later scholars like Leslie Stephen or J. B. Bury or Bernard Bosanquet whose history of aesthetics even Benedetto Croce once admitted had no match. Such a tone to their intellectual practices, it can be noted, was fully compatible with the work of some of the foreign scholars who had come to England earlier, Ludwig Wittgenstein in philosophy, Bronislaw Malinowski in anthropology, Lewis Namier in history, Melanie Klein in psychoanalysis. Here Wittgenstein can be the example; that if for him philosophy does not interfere with the use of language but merely describes it, such an account of its practice encouraged a form of political quietism, all revolutionary convictions, as a friend noted, seeming to him immoral. And his concerns fitted closely the work of the contemporary English philosophers, Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore. Here we may generalize further, using the words of one of these earlier arrivals; the English, so Namier would happily claim – and his work on the parliamentary system in the eighteenth century was defiantly based on strict historical evidence - perceive and accept facts without, as he added, anxiously enquiring into their reasons and meanings. In such a context, what we can call the limited interests of these foreigners, free of thinking of any wider social or political issues, allowed them to be accepted into the culture all the more easily, every insular reflex and prejudice, as Perry Anderson has said, being both powerfully flattered and even enlarged in the mirror that, as outsiders, they presented to it.

<sup>21</sup> I base this account of English intellectual life on P. Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *English Questions*, London: Verso, 1992, 48-104 and A. Hemingway, 'E H Gombrich in 1968: Methodological Individualism and the Contradictions of Conservatism', *Human Affairs*, 3, 2009, 297-303.

<sup>22</sup> For Momigliano, see A. Grafton, 'Momigliano's Method and the Warburg Institute: Studies in his Middle Period,' P. Miller, *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 102. And for Namier, L. Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, 1961, 13.

Perhaps we should not describe this intellectual situation too starkly for both Pevsner and Wittkower were happy to invoke certain general concepts familiar in historical writing. But this they did very carefully. It has been noted that Pevsner, for all his concern with facts and particulars, never entirely turned away from the tradition of *Geistesgeschichte* that he knew from his teacher Wilhelm Pinder. Yet when describing what he called the Englishness of English art - the title of a series of talks he gave on the B.B.C. - he chose to say that if indeed there was such an idea, referring to a book on that subject by the German art historian Dagobert Frey, he himself feared to impose too much of a system upon his subject, to avoid losing in truth and in richness, so he said, what might be gained in order and lucidity. And Wittkower - and the title of his Pelican volume spoke merely of a history of art and architecture in Italy from 1600 to 1750 - was fully prepared, if for reasons of clarity, to use the standard general categories of the Renaissance and the Baroque, invoking even the newer distinctions between Early, High and Late Baroque art. But he did so, as he warned in his opening words, possibly recognizing such terminological barricades were to a degree fallacious, misleading, as he put it, both the author and his public. What then we can see here are these scholars, like many others who came over in those years, fruitfully enjoying the two traditions, the German and the English, yet doing so now - and here we might see, in the case of Wittkower, his furthest step away from Warburg and his interest in magic- in ways that emphasized always amidst the history they worked with what can be called the reasonable, the rational. Thus then explicitly for Wittkower, the idea of proportion was itself a property of architecture, independent of the built structure, or then the image of Vitruvian man represented a form of order and reason that, by his account, clearly existed within Renaissance architecture as a whole. Even before these years, in his dispute in the 1930s with Hans Sedlmayr about the roots of the style of Borromini, we can see the same emphasis, one about rationality versus simple passion, measure versus disorder.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For a recent assessment of Pevsner's writings see A. Payne, 'Review of N. Pevsner, 'Pioneers of the Modern Movement, 1936', *Harvard Design Magazine*, 2002, 66-70. And for recent responses to the work of Wittkower, H. A. Millon, 'Rudolf Wittkower, Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism: Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 31, 1972, 83 - 91. A. Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 53, 1994, 322-342. F. Zöllner, 'L'uomo vitruviano di Leonardo da Vinci, Rudolf Wittkower e l'Angelus novus di Walter Benjamin, *Raccoltà vinciana*, 26, 1995, 328-58. B. Mitrovic, 'A Palladian palinode: re-assessing Rudolf Wittkower's architectural principles in the Age of Humanism', *Architectura*, 31, 2001, 113-131; C. van Eck, 'The Warburg Institute and Architectural History, *Common Knowledge*, 18, 2011, 131-145; F. Benelli, (2015). 'Rudolf Wittkower versus Le Corbusier: A Matter of Proportion', *Architectural Histories*, 3(1) 2015, Art. 8. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.ck>.

This essay began with stories about Rudolf and Margot Wittkower and their earliest encounters with the culture and history of England.<sup>24</sup> It can end with an account of another part of the activities of Wittkower, together with Saxl, in the first years of the Warburg Institute in London, touchingly fitting for that moment. One of the most original intellectual activities of Aby Warburg was his Mnemosyne Atlas, a project of memory based on photography, a ghost story for adults as he called it, images placed in various orders upon a set of screens and panels to suggest connections and differences. Much has been said about the philosophical implications of such a project but here it is enough to look at the practical aspects of this program and note that for a general public such a way of displaying visual objects could form an exhibition of connections, accessible in ways the static presentations of the museum perhaps did not allow. Photography had always been a vital part of Warburg's interests – hence the vast collection of photographs that arrived, amidst all the other materials, when the Institute was moved to London. It is interesting then to note that the appointment of Wittkower by Saxl to the Warburg, made all the easier to the authorities since through his father Wittkower had British citizenship, was to the photography collection which he then organized to make it openly usable in its new surroundings.

In Hamburg Saxl had also organized a number of photographic exhibitions, the topics there including town planning and architecture and in London during the war four similar exhibitions were arranged. In 1939, at a meeting of the Classical Association, held at the Institute there were lectures and, to accompany them, a photographic exhibition was organized by Wittkower and Otto Pacht to illustrate the visual context of the classical tradition. The first such exhibition at the Warburg Institute itself, opening in 1939, was on Greek and Roman art, followed by one on Indian art, based on the collection of the scholar Stella Kramrish who had moved from Europe to India in the 1930s. Both of these exhibitions were popular but even more successful was the one that had as its subject the relationship over the years between English art and the Mediterranean. With the support of the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, a government organization led by John Maynard Keynes, this exhibition, when it closed in London, travelled in the following months around England to eighteen other cities. This exhibition had been opened on December 2, 1941 by Kenneth Clark and in his address he referred to the opportunities it offered; that it brought the activities of the Warburg Institute to a wider audience; that it demonstrated how, even in the worst of times, human studies, as he called them, could be kept alive.

<sup>24</sup> For a rich account of the Mnemosyne project see L. Saltzman, *Daguerrotypes: Fugitive Subjects, Contemporary Objects*, Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2015, 80-81, 173-74; and for the exhibitions, D. McEwan, 'Exhibitions as Morale Boosters: the Exhibition Programme of the Warburg Institute, 1938-1945', in *Arts in Exile in Britain, 1933-1945: Politics and Cultural Identity*, edited S. Behr, M. Malet, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, 267-99; C. Anderson, 'War work: English art and the Warburg Institute', *Common Knowledge*, 18, 2012, 149-161.

In their introduction to the publication that accompanied the exhibition, Saxl and Wittkower added more, saying that the contacts between England and the Mediterranean produced results of permanent value, perhaps nowhere better than in art as is shown, so they continued – and here Warburg would have been deeply pleased - by the fascinating transformations the foreign elements experienced as soon as they were introduced into this new context. Also noted were the many scholars and public institutions approached for special requests, the more so, they added, since the library of the Warburg Institute was at that moment inaccessible. Photographs alone, they acknowledged, however good and modern, could never give the right idea of a work of art; nor were those selected representative of the best. Yet they were records of history and ones particularly crucial at that moment with the destruction being rained down on England. The value of such photographs had been recognized a year earlier when the National Buildings Record was established under the direction of Walter Godfrey, to record the architecture still there, though always threatened. In the end, the photographs of the Warburg did not become a part of this program but help was offered in many practical ways to the National Buildings Record. This is how we might end this history of exchanges; that within the photographic exhibitions of the Warburg Institute, organized as they were by scholars exiled from the culture they had grown up in, something could survive still of what was called the vital memory of things.

The Warburg Institute, despite some recent problems, is still there, as part of University College, London and the Department of the History of Art. And in its faculty and associates and in the range of subjects covered by its courses and research it mirrors, if now in an even wider context, the range of interests Warburg fostered; to quote the phrase of Salvatore Settis the institution, still there, can be called the Warburg *continuatus*. Nicholas Mann, its director from 1990 to 2001, has called it the gift Europe gave to Britain. Now it continues, giving back to Europe what it had received those years earlier, but in ways, he had to add, that are ineffably English, both in its underfunding and what, in another aspect and more powerfully, he could call its understated scholarly pragmatism.

**David Cast** was educated at Oxford and Columbia University where he completed his Phd. in 1970 under the supervision of Rudolf Wittkower. He has taught at Yale, Cornell and, for the last thirty years, at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where he is Professor and Eugenia Chase Guild Professor of the Humanities emeritus.. His most recent publications include *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari* (2014) and *Observation: Notation: Selected Writings of Andrew Forge, 1955-2002*, (2018).

dcast@brynmawr.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)