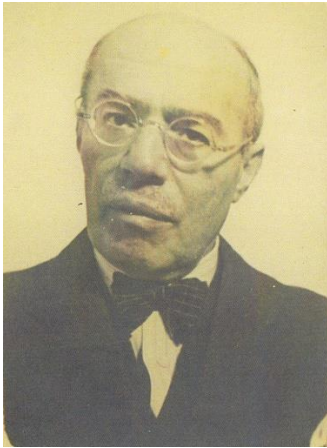


High Wych History 59

The Goldschmidts - uncle Goe and auntie Tasie

by John Oliver with additional research from TvdB

In 1939, just before the start of the second world war, Albert and Thesie Goldschmidt, two German Jewish refugees came to live in High Wych. Lady Foote gave them a room on the ground floor of the Curatage, her house near the centre of our village, also known as Wychcroft.



Albert and Thesie Goldschmidt

The Goldschmidts, being German had to report either weekly or fortnightly to my father, Jack Oliver, the High Wych policeman. Seeing them regularly, my mother became friends with them. We, that is my mother and I, visited them most weeks. This was not a popular friendship as Lady Foote did not think the Goldschmidts should be associating with people of a lower status. Likewise, my father's sergeant thought a policeman's wife should not be fraternizing with Germans. However it was not long before I called them uncle Goe and auntie Tasie.

Lady Foote by the way, was the widow of Admiral Sir Reginald Foote (1853 – 1931), who, from 1902 to 1904 was Naval Aide de Camps to King Edward VII. Lady Foote was a leading light in the High Wych WI.

I remember they took me for a walk down Bakers Lane High Wych. We came to a farm type gate leading through a spinney to a park which is now the golf course of the Manor of Groves. On the gate was a skull and crossbones sign. At that point I recall, they both became rather disturbed and we returned to my mother who quickly put them at ease. Little did I know at that time that that sign, in German called the "totenkopf" was a widely used Nazi emblem. In this case it was however simply a keep out sign. There may have been a small arms dump in the spinney.

The Goldschmidts came from Bavaria; Albert had been a judge in Munich. They must have been quite affluent; I was told they had flown to London and Milan just to go to the Opera! They had a big house and Albert – Uncle Goe had owned a large library with many precious books. However in the “Kristallnacht”, the night of the broken glass in November 1938, everything was destroyed in an anti-semitic pogrom. That very same month Albert’s brother was murdered. He was an early victim at the Dachau concentration camp. Only a few weeks later Albert Goldschmidt, together with many other Jewish people was forbidden to practice his profession. They just had no other option but to flee. In July 1939 they found refuge in the UK.

It should perhaps be mentioned here that the UK was not as welcoming to Jewish refugees as many now claim. An article in the Herts and Essex Observer I came across mentioned 31,819 Germans arriving within three months and that they were the “chief alien arrivals”. There was no mention of the fact that most of those “German aliens” must have been Jewish and were fleeing persecution. Also, many of those landing on British shores preferred to have a simple transit visa and carry on to the US. That was definitely the case with most of Albert Goldschmidt’s Jewish colleagues from the legal profession.

Thesie Goldschmidt had a daughter from an earlier marriage. Susi Bauer had always wanted to be a fine art painter but her mother and step father insisted she first get a skill so she could finance herself. She and her German husband had arrived in the UK some time before Albert and Thesi and escaped the Third Reich separately, one sailing to England from Spain, the other one from a Mediterranean port in either France or Italy. Herbert Thoma, her husband was a count but never used his title in England. He had worked at Munich University. Sadly Herbert would have been interned for the first few years of his UK residency, probably on the Isle of Man. Before that, in the summer months of 1939 he married Susi at Paddington registry office. In Nazi Germany such a marriage would have been illegal.

Albert Goldschmidt was already not in the best of health when he came to Britain. He suffered from Parkinson’s Disease. He passed away in May 1944 and is buried in St. James’s churchyard. As Albert was Jewish a special ceremony was needed. Upon the death of Lady Foote Thesie Goldschmidt moved to Old Harlow. After 1956 she then moved to Germany where she got a pension and hopefully some compensation for the terrible injustices visited on her and her husband.

Susi took up a career as fashion designer for Marks and Spencer where she spent most of her working life. She had to work hard. All through the war she had to finance her husband, her mother, stepfather and her maternal grandmother who had a room in a schoolteacher's house in Rowney Gardens. Herbert was released from internment in 1942 or 1943 but was then not allowed to work. Both he and Susi came to visit and I remember Herbert carrying me home after I had fallen from my tricycle. By coincidence my father and Herbert realised they had been fighting on opposite sides of the same front during the first world war! After the war he became a lecturer in German at the Institute of Modern Language Research at Kings College London.



The picture with my mother on the left with Herbert and Susi Thoma was taken just after his internment release. The picture on the right shows the Goldschmidt's grave stone. Thesie died in 1967. There is uncertainty where her remains lie. There is no record of a funeral service in St. James's. She most probably died in Germany and her name was added to the grave stone later.

Herbert and Susi Thoma stayed on in England. Herbert died in 1975, Susi, who was quite a bit younger in 1993.

Sources this time were the Herts & Essex Observer, Reinhard Weber's book on the fate of Jewish Lawyers in Bavaria post 1933, the website of London University's Institute of Modern Language Research, Wikipedia, Ancestry.co.uk and as always, Hertfordshire Archives and Library Services. We still need your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well criticism, be it positive or negative. E-mail me at theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone me at 01279 725468.