



# My grandparents' journey to safety in England



Refugees: Alex and Anne Singer in England, date unknown, and, right, a photo taken in 1915 of Alex Singer practising as a dentist in a German Field Hospital during the First World War

**Debora Singer MBE lives in the heart of East Finchley and has devoted a large part of her life and career to campaigning for a fairer society in the fields of human rights and helping refugees, and received her MBE in 2012 for services to women seeking asylum, whilst working at Asylum Aid. Her own family history of many relatives fleeing persecution informs her work today at human rights charity René Cassin. To mark Holocaust Memorial Day last month, Debora recounts the experience of her grandparents who escaped the hell of Nazi Germany.**

My grandparents were both dentists. It was unusual for a woman to be a dentist in the 1930s, so I am very proud of my grandmother. Anne and Alex Singer had separate surgeries in Nürnberg in Germany and brought up their children as the Nazi laws took hold. Their journey to safety in England is now illustrated in the Refugee Map created by the Wiener Holocaust Library.

The map shows that in November 1939, my grandfather Alex Singer was one of thousands of Jewish men rounded up and sent to an internment camp, in his case Dachau. By this time their son Peter (my father) was 16 and at Farnham Grammar School in Surrey. Peter's headmaster, Dr Morgan, with others, helped my grandparents to obtain visas and they arrived in Farnham. Their visas stated that they were not allowed to work for a year. Indeed dentists were not allowed to work at all because British dentists were concerned about competition.

### Kindness of strangers

With no money or means of earning, my grandparents were dependent on the kindness of strangers. Dr Morgan had them over to his house for meals

every day. When Alex tried to thank him, he brushed him off saying it was a privilege to help.

The next place on the map is the Isle of Man. In 1940, Alex was one of many so-called "enemy aliens" interned there. Although the camp proved a cultural environment, it was very hard for Alex and his family to be separated for nearly a year. Finally the map shows that my grandparents settled in London. Sadly Anne's health declined and she died of cancer in 1951. Alex continued trying in vain to obtain work as a dentist. Meanwhile he provided dental treatment to other refugees in north London despite



Tracing her family history: Debora Singer

it being against the rules.

### Parallels today

I work at René Cassin, where the human rights of refugees are one of the areas we campaign on. Looking at my grandparents' map and story, my colleagues and I were intrigued by the many parallels with the experiences of people seeking asylum today. There are common themes of persecution, the need for safe and legal routes, visa requirements, the kindness of strangers, internment/detention, not being allowed to work and working illegally.

My hope is that we can learn from my grandparents' story to improve the experiences of people seeking protection from persecution now.

### Scams sense

In October 2024 Barnet residents lost over £1.3 million to scams. Age UK Barnet is offering one-to-one support to anyone over 50 to help them change their habits and reduce their risk of becoming a victim.

A member of the Age UK team can give a talk to your organisation or group, and they are on hand to provide extra support to individuals as well.

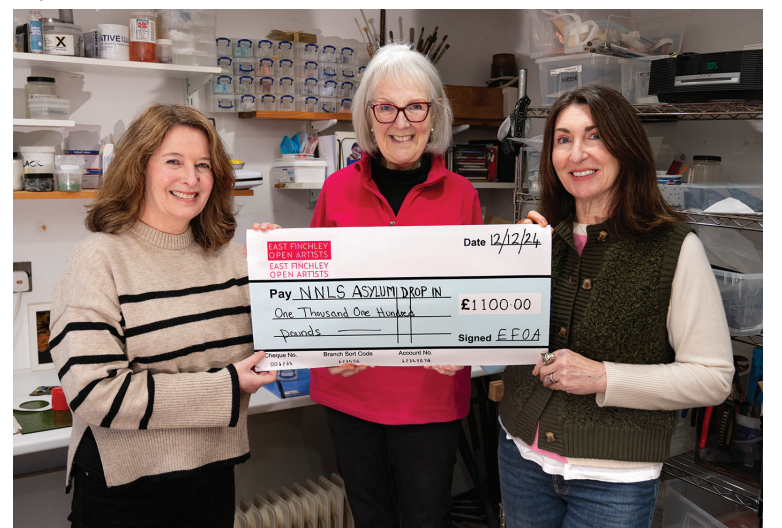
Email [scamsawareness@ageukbarnet.org.uk](mailto:scamsawareness@ageukbarnet.org.uk) or call 020 8432 2217.

### Tell us the news in N2

Have you got a news story or an interesting photo for us? Tell us what is going on in East Finchley by emailing [news@the-archer.co.uk](mailto:news@the-archer.co.uk) or leave a message on our free phone line 0800 612 0748. Thank you.

## Artists raise funds for asylum seekers

East Finchley Open Artists, a community arts group, raised £1,100 at their annual arts and crafts Winter Fair raffle for north London charity, NNLS Destitute Asylum Seekers Drop-in, a charity that helps to relieve hardship and provides support to those seeking asylum.



Vital service: Representatives from the East Finchley Open Artists group with the funds raised to support the asylum drop-in

## Indoor bargains

The next Muswell Hill Indoor Car Boot Sale takes place on Saturday 22 February from 10am to 1pm in its usual venue of Hornsey Parish Church Hall on the corner of Cranley Gardens and Park Road, N10 3AH. Buses W7, W3 and 144 stop nearby. Admission is 50p and refreshments are available.

This regular event always takes place on the last Saturday of each month, offering a wide variety of stalls and bargains. For more information, contact 020 8368 8180.

## The Archer on the move

The Archer's website is now easier to use on your mobile phone. Our online pages have been redesigned to make it quicker to find important information like contact details and deadlines, and simpler to read our latest edition or search and browse past editions of the newspaper in our archive stretching back to 1993.

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