Chapter 27

Refugees

Janis Wilton

On 11 march the Sydney *Sun* announced 'German Army Invades Austria'. For the next two weeks German actions dominated the newspapers. On 21 March the *Sun* reported a reign of terror against Jews in Australia. By April Hitler was forgotten by most Australians, at least for a time. The headlines reverted to the usual mixture of local and foreign news, from 'Gay Sydney Welcomes Giant Liner' when the *Empress of Britain* entered the harbour (2 April) to 'Italy Makes Concessions' (16 April). The local Jewish press had misgivings about Hitler's invasion of Austria which at first it tried to suppress, especially after the new Austrian government declared that there would be no change in policy towards the Jews. When it became evident that this assurance was worthless, the Australian Jewish community responded with both horror at the plight of Austrian Jews and alarm at the prospect of masses of Jewish emigrants seeking to enter Australia.

GERMAN ARMY NOT READY

EXPERTS' OPINION

BRITISH AND FRENCH GENERAL STAFFS

LITTLE FEAR OF WAR

"The Argus" Independent Cable Service

LONDON, Wednesday.

Germany is not ready to embark upon any large-scale military action. That is the opinion of the British and French General Staffs, which are said to hold the view that the preparatory stages of the German manœuvres have revealed the unpreparedness of the Third Reich as a complete military machine.

Argus, *18 Aug 1938.*

This dilemma persisted throughout the year. Money was raised to help persecuted Jews get out of central Europe, and welcome committees arranged receptions for the trickle of new arrivals, but until the government prompted them, Australian Jews made no call to open Australian doors to the Jews of Europe. By December over 2000 Jews had arrived as refugees, and that month the government promised to take 15 000 more during the next three years.

Many came from the Viennese middle class. They were professionals, manufacturers or highly skilled tradesmen. They had not suffered greatly during the depression, and had the connections and money to evade the steadily tightening regulations controlling movement out of Austria, which demanded, an English writer observed, that a Viennese obtain certificates to prove that 'even if he had no dog . . . he was not in arrears with his dog tax'. Family jewels, money and goods became the currency of survival. The Nazi newspaper, *Voelkischer Beobachter*, announced in April: 'Jews stealing away from Austria will not be allowed to steal any part of their fortunes with them'.

The need for cash to bribe Austrian officials, and (that dangerous task done) to resettle with some hope and comfort in Australia, obliged those who had not

already sent money out of the country to resort to devious and perilous ways of salvaging some of their fortunes. Many succeeded. Harry Seidler's parents bribed the Nazi who had been given charge of their factory so that they could send their manufacturing machinery ahead of them. Australians, one refugee discovered, 'had never before met with a similar group of migrants'. Many stepped off the ship with 'more than the required £200 in capital ... high levels of education and cultural experience and wearing fur coats and bringing with them antiques and furniture'.

Even money could not guarantee safety. Some countries refused outright to admit Jewish refugees: the United States would not relax its quota system, and France would allow, at most, only a transit visa. Money or valued skills were needed for entry to other countries. The South American states were interested only in farmers; Canada would not accept refugees while unemployment existed; Britain made it dangerous, almost impossible, for Jews to evade the blockade into Palestine. In contrast Australia's offer was almost generous. Applicants were given landing permits if they had trades which did not threaten Australian industries, if they were nominated by an Australian resident, and if they could produce £50 landing money or have their maintenance guaranteed by an Australian resident. People without a guarantor or sponsor could still enter if they had at least £200 capital, especially if they were prepared to invest in the development of a new industry.

Australia wanted capital and new businesses, and expressed less interest in skills, particularly professional skills. Ingenuity, adaptation and contacts, however tenuous, played a part in being admitted. One refugee disowned his background as a musician and applied for an entry permit to make brooches. He enclosed a sample with his application. Another managed to establish contact with people at the Myers emporium in Melbourne while working as a salesgirl in a luxury hotel in Vienna. They sponsored her to Australia.

Luck and perseverance were also needed. One young Viennese man had a mother who was Jewish and a father who was not. 'I didn't belong to the Jewish community [but] I must have looked Jewish to the Viennese as I was always treated as a Jew.' He was just as imperilled as any Jew under the Nazi racial purity regulations, but could not get help from Jewish organisations. He wrote to people with the same surname in the United States, Argentina, South Africa and Australia, and at last a distant relative in Melbourne agreed to sponsor him if he produced his own landing money. Long hours were spent walking the streets of Vienna and queueing at agencies and embassies, until the Swedish Mission organised a temporary refuge with foster-parents in Ireland. He took with him a camera, films, a bicycle, a jacket, a watch, two blankets and 12s 6d.

Many Viennese refugees had hated to leave their beloved city. A non-Jewish Austrian explained to Australians that while there was poverty and disruption in Vienna

> there was a different opera at the opera house every night; one State ball followed another, and good conductors like Bruno Walter and Fürtwangler, and singers like Lotte Lehmann had no reason to complain about small audiences ... There is no more joyful city in the world.

But in February 1938 a Viennese was brave to use the present tense to describe the city's glories. Bloody confrontations between the socialist Schutzbund and the Austrian Heimwehr had made way for the brutal storming of workers' tenements and the Nazis' assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss in 1934. Widespread poverty and intense class divisions had followed, threatening to erupt into political turmoil. Then in March 1938 had come the Anschluss, making Austria part of Hitler's domain.

FEE.—£1 (One Pound.) Form No. 41

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

Permit **No.** 22488

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
CANBERRA, F.C.T.,
21st June, 1938

LANDING PERMIT.

To whom it may concern:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that permission has been granted for the admission to Australia of the undermentioned person or persons (one in number), said to be of nationality, at present residing in Austria -Germany ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xx Australia has been guaranteed by Mr~~ ~~xx~~

This authority has been granted subject to the conditions that such person or persons shall be in sound health, of good character, and in possession of a Passport or Certificate of Identity, bearing photograph of the holder , and duly visaed (if not issued) by a British Consular or Passport Officer, and subject to any further conditions which may be stated below.

This Permit is valid until 17th May, 1939.

NAME.	AGE.	RELATIONSHIP (if any) TO GUARANTOR.
KRIPS, Heinrich	26 years	-

NOTE:- Bearer must satisfy the Customs Authorities on arrival in Australia that he is in possession of at least £200 (Australian currency) capital.

~~Forwarded to~~ Mr. Heinrich Krips,
5 Saarplatz,
Vienna 19,
AUSTRIA.- GERMANY.

B. Baker
By authority of the Minister for the Interior.

NOTE.—This Permit should be forwarded to the person in whose favour it has been issued (or to the chief member of the party if more than one person is included in the Permit) for production when applying for passport facilities or steamer passage tickets, and for production and surrender to the Examining Officer of Customs at the Australian port of disembarkation.

If an extension of this Permit is desired, application should be addressed to the Department of the Interior. A fee of 10/- (ten shillings) is payable for each year's extension authorized.

The commonwealth Department of the Interior issued this landing permit to 26-year-old Viennese musician Henry Krips on 21 June for a fee of £1. He had to satisfy Customs officers that he had at least £200 capital and that he was in 'sound health' and of 'good character'. The permit was valid until 17 May 1939 when an application could be lodged for a year's extension for a payment of 10s. Document in the possession of H. Krips.

Middle-class Jews were at first insulated from this turmoil, at least in recollection. One refugee whose memories often returned lovingly to the old Austro–Hungarian empire stated that he would have been a Nazi if only he had not been Jewish! With some embarrassment the musician Henry Krips, who arrived in Australia in 1938, admitted that before the Anschluss

> Politics didn't affect me at all . . . daily life continued and I just didn't comprehend the ramifications despite Hitler next door, despite Dollfuss's assassination . . . After all, so many screwballs had lived in Vienna at one time or another.

Such refugees brought with them memories of a rich life cruelly destroyed. Insecurity and despair often made them react badly to their new surroundings; obsessed with their own sufferings, many regarded Australia as an uncouth land to which misfortune had condemned them. They simultaneously complained that Australians did not like them, and made sweeping criticisms of the country which had offered them refuge. For many these first impressions persisted. One complained that there was 'very little cultural life ... we formed our own circle of friends ... and invited lecturers to come along because this type of facility was lacking'. Another discovered that 'a man seen at a concert was seen as a sissy'. But some were more tolerant. A Viennese Jew who found 'hardly any cultural life' in Australia was willing to concede that 'if I had known the language, maybe I would have found it. It's silly to say there was no culture, there is always some. But there was no traditional culture'. To a refugee academic, Australia seemed 'an anti-intellectual place', a 'lucky, unsophisticated, backward country', where 'a senior lecturer at university didn't earn more than a foreman. To be an academic was nothing'.

Insinuations of backwardness were also made by Australians about refugees. 'People in Adelaide', one newcomer recalls, 'were quite surprised that I could handle a knife and fork. They did not understand that Central Europe was the centre of a very high culture'.

The central Europeans found puzzling differences between the new society and the world they had left behind: 'Everyday living standards were simpler. Houses were weatherboard. But people had cars. We were immediately invited to middle class homes, quite lavish ... [But they] didn't have servants'. The cities themselves looked unfamiliar. Arriving in Fremantle and seeing Perth, a refugee was

> amazed at the difference to the European cities. We had not seen any tall houses, no-one lived in apartments. There were individual houses with gardens for each family. I liked it very much but it did not look like a city. It was like a widespread

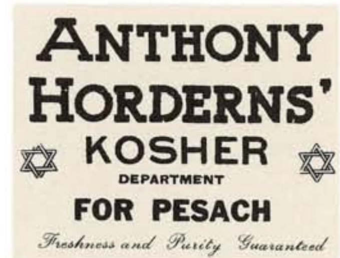
'Alarmed at the overwhelming influx of aliens, the Federal Government proposes to take early steps to stimulate emigration from Britain.' Tom Glover's cartoon entitled 'They're Both Flat Out!' in the Sydney Sun, *9 Jan 1938.*

country town. In Sydney our impression was similar to Perth but in a larger scale. It seemed very primitive to us. We saw that it was an absolutely different way of living than we were used to.

Different it was. The food was different. The newcomers found 'only mild and mature cheese, and white bread', that 'coffee was something with milk in', and that the evening meal could consist of 'corned beef and pavlovas'. Jobs were different. Few refugees could resume their Viennese careers. Solicitors tried farming, a medical doctor polished silver in a jewellery shop, another doctor, a woman, got work as a seamstress. Professional people went into commerce or manufacturing. Some set up factories using the capital they had brought with them, others became door-to-door salesmen. Women did piecework at home and served as domestics. Customs were different. Unlike the Viennese, Australian women wore hats and gloves in the street, very few people even among the Jewish community spoke a language other than English, the laws were not the same, the shops sold different goods and at different times. The whole country appeared peculiar.

These difficulties were heightened by the attitudes of Australians. Most Australians, Jewish and non-Jewish, did not want the new arrivals. The refugees were as peculiar to Australians as Australians were to them. Australian traditions were solidly British, albeit of a local variety, and the Australian Jewish community shared them. The main centres of Australian Jewry were in Sydney and Melbourne. Both communities were dominated by Anglo-Jewry, although Melbourne had many eastern and central European Jews who had fled either from the Russian pogroms earlier in the century or from growing European anti-Semitism in the 1920s and early 1930s. Sydney was the headquarters of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, which in 1937 had become the chief agency for aid from the Australian Jewish community. The attitudes of both the society and the community were expressed in the Sydney weekly, the *Hebrew Standard*.

Hebrew Standard, *24 Mar 1938.*



By the 1930s the *Standard*'s financial survival depended on contributions from the Great Synagogue in Elizabeth Street and from various organisations in the Sydney Jewish community. By 1938 its contents mirrored that community's activities. Meetings were reported in full, announcements about forthcoming functions filled the social columns, Great Synagogue sermons were reprinted, and film reviews appeared regularly, as did a travel column by a north shore woman who spent most of an eight-months tour of Europe in England. Overseas news items were generally small paragraphs listing the latest anti-Semitic extremes in Europe or the most recent troubles or achievements of Jewish settlers in Palestine. Occasionally feature articles lamented the plight of brethren suffering in Europe, and campaigns to raise funds for them or Jews in Palestine were advertised and supported. But immigration was an issue generally avoided until late in 1938, after the government's decision to accept refugees. In November the *Standard* introduced a column called 'The New Australian', but its judgment of the newcomers remained wary. If anything, they hardened.

The *Standard* was thoroughly pro-British and anti-Zionist. Its founder and editor, Alfred Harris, was born in Australia in 1870 of Prussian parents and his wife was Anglo-Jewish. He believed, as he wrote in January, that the only way to defeat anti-Semitism was to 'keep our faith in British traditions; affirm our faith in them and by cooperation with Jewry's leaders in Britain, work to stem the tide of such vicious prejudice and passion'. The sesquicentenary provoked him to praise for things British:

> We are grateful for the privilege to share in the happy celebrations of our beloved country. Those whose birthplace it is feel a special thrill of pride in their

> glorious heritage. It is our own—our native land. Consequently it is not merely hero-worship when we remark upon our debt to the spirit of adventure, the skill and the courage as well as the scientific duty which took Capt. James Cook on the voyage which placed Australia under the benign and blessed rule of the British with a heritage of freedom and toleration.
>
> As ever where the British flag flies the right to freedom of conscience is fully assured, therefore Jews as well as other communities established themselves in peace and content...
>
> Since those early days, as ever, Australian Jewry has worked assiduously to help in building up this loyal and industrious section of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

After the occupation of Austria and reports of the increasing suffering of Jews in Europe, Harris told his readers 'to thank God for the Magna Carta', as it was the British democratic system which saved Australia and Australian Jews from similar persecution.

Although Harris agreed that some migrants should be accepted, he wanted only those 'who will become good Australian citizens—who will assimilate Australian traditions and loyalties'. To this end, Harris and other Jews advised that migrants be selected carefully, and be dispersed throughout the Australian economy and society. The *Standard* advertised the schemes initiated by the Jewish Welfare Society. At the Chelsea Park Training Farm doctors, tradesmen and businessmen could learn to work the land. Technical schools would 'teach Australian standards of pastry-cooking and domestic work', a decentralisation committee would seek openings for rural employment, and a welcome committee would see that new arrivals were met at the boat and their re-education commenced immediately. All these activities were directed towards making the newcomers 'valued and effective Australian citizens, in keeping with the undertaking that they would not in any way cause a deterioration of Australian standards or displace anyone now in employment'.

Although Jewish Welfare offered English language classes for new arrivals, its officials apparently expected refugees to learn English on the day of arrival. Reception committees and relatives were told that 'Only the English language should be spoken on the boat and on the wharf, in all instances'. It was equally important that these strange foreign brethren avoid criticism like that from an Australian Jewess who lamented at 'the way they have taken over the beach at Bondi—charging all over the place—talking loudly, behaving aggressively, it has made the beach untenable for ordinary citizens'.

The *Standard* advocated country settlement as an ideal way of dispersing new arrivals, and published letters extolling the virtues of rural living. To judge from his remarks in the *Standard*, one new arrival, 'settled in the country for some months', had certainly learnt his lesson well:

> The stranger will find in the country the mental rest he needs to acquire a new balance and quick contact with the Australian people—to a greater degree than in the hard struggle of life and the rush and bustle of the big cities. He will find sympathy, understanding and help. Even because he is more alone, he will more easily become rooted in the soil and more quickly assimilated. But this assimilation must be not only of habits, but of thoughts, sentiments and feelings.

The Migrants' Consultative Committee, a body made up of recent arrivals under the auspices of Jewish Welfare late in the year, rapidly absorbed the teachings of its Australian-born counterparts. On 1 December the *Standard* printed a message

Austrian refugees arriving by ship in Sydney, 27 Oct 1938.
MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS

from the committee 'To all migrants'. It set out four 'unwritten laws' which should be observed in order not to 'discredit' incoming immigrants.

> 1. Avoid creating bitterness by competition in crowded businesses or professions.
> 2. Seek and explore every opportunity for productive occupation especially in the country places.
> 3. Do not form distinctive groups. Again we advise you—do not congregate in typically alien districts.
> 4. Refrain from unjustified criticism of any committee. It causes resentment and disheartens our Australian friends who are actually doing their utmost for us.

FRONTIERS TO BE INVIOLATE

ITALY-GERMANY

HITLER'S SPEECH AT ROME DINNER

HIS UNALTERABLE WILL

"The Argus" Independent Cable Service

ROME, Sunday.

Speaking at a dinner in Rome last night, Herr Hitler declared that it was his unalterable will that the frontiers of Italy and Germany should for ever be inviolable.

Argus, *9 May 1938.*

There was little common ground between this desire that foreigners should vanish into society, and the needs of Jews dislocated by escape and flight and searching for a safe place to resume their lives. A non-Jewish poet, Margaret Diesendorf, who arrived as a refugee in 1938, emphasised this dislocation in sad, acerbic verse:

> We immigrants of 1938
> were chopped in half
> even before we left our homeland,
> by the hatchet of one man's fierce will,
> Body and Soul (the latter now unnamable)
> existing still
> but henceforth separate
> at best trotting next to one another
> hand in hand,
> twin glancing surreptitiously at twin,
> at worst, *Seele* [Soul] limping behind,
> Body throwing stones at the
> wayward companion.
>
> . . .
> Then the Pacific sungod
> swung his sharp dazzling hatchet
> and chopped in turn:
> quartered, we continue to run
> (Soul's fled long ago),
> fourlegged, yet not fast enough.
> Four legs
> without the bridge of a spine?
> Thus we shall run until death,
> with a final blow,
> severs the life line.

COMING TO PERTH

Elise Blumann with her husband and two young sons arrived in Perth as a refugee from Hitler's Germany in January 1938. Here she talks to Carolyn Polizzotto about her new life in Australia.

Elise Blumann in 1938.

Elise Blumann's husband Arnold with their two sons Nils (left) and Charles at a bush picnic.
BLUMANN COLLECTION

WE HAD LIVED through one war in Europe and we *knew* what another would be like. Australia was as far away as you could possibly be, so we came here in 1938. We arrived at Fremantle on 4 January, and were met by the head of the factory which my husband had been appointed to advise. As we were about to get into his car, Charles, my elder son, went to sit in front, next to the driver's seat. He had always sat next to the chauffeur in England: his father did not drive. The gentleman put his hand rather hard on his shoulder and said, 'No! Your father sits there!'. Charles was not accustomed to being reprimanded in that way.

We drove up the Stirling Highway: the Norfolk pines and the blackboys, they fascinated me. The landscape made an immediate impression on me, and the light. The country I loved at once, but the people: that took longer! We drove to the house in Mosman Park where we were to have breakfast. Nils, who was only three, did not approve of it. He said, 'I want a house with *no people* and a banana tree in the garden!'. His nurse in England, you see, had told him in Australia it would be like that.

Then a professor from the university arrived. He knew of my husband by reputation and wished to greet him. His wife wanted to meet the children, who by now had been shown into the garden. She pointed to Charles and asked him, 'What is *your* name?'. He stood to attention and roared, 'My name is Charles John Blumann and I am *thirteen years old*! And this is my brother, Nils, who is *just three*!'. Afterwards I asked him, 'Charles, why did you speak like that? You know how not to be rude.' He said, 'Mother, I know what sort of questions people ask, who point their finger in that manner, and so I answered in the same way.' The children's behaviour seemed poor here; but over there they had been noted for their good manners, Charles especially. So it was not entirely their fault.

Before we came, we had requested a housekeeper and a nurse to be ready for us when we arrived. But of course they did not do it. They had found a servant—so-called—but no nurse: such a thing was simply unheard of here. I learned to cook. It was not difficult, I found, only rather boring. The first time I cooked a roast it was all right—we ate it—but afterwards when I went out to the kitchen I found that the servant had thrown all the rest away. She was a country

girl and she was used to doing that. In the country, they had all the meat they wanted.

We had our first dinner party. I had I suppose nine or ten couples. This we considered a big party. One woman said, 'That's not what *we* call a big party! For that, you need *at least* a hundred people!' Well, I ask you. What do you have a party for? The conversation! And it is simply not possible to have a proper conversation among so many. Anyway. I did everything properly: we even had finger bowls. Ha! I soon learned. It had not occurred to me, with only one servant, what the washing up would be like! I soon changed!

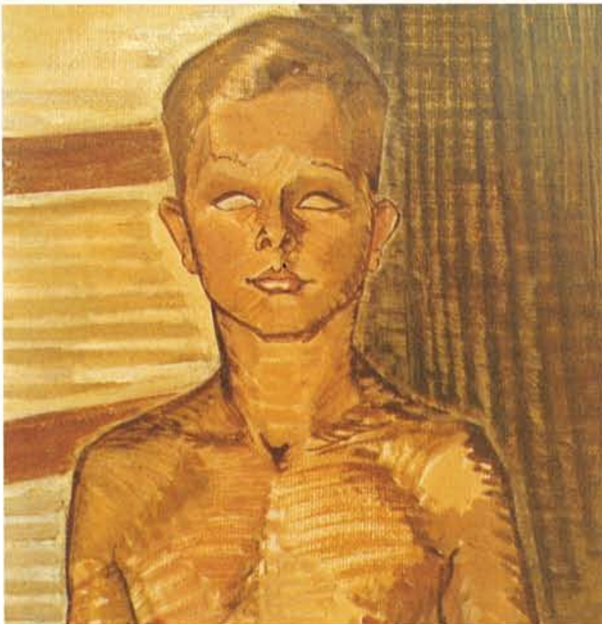
The house we had in Hamburg, No 2 Holbeinstrasse, was beautiful. When we escaped I hated leaving it. After that, in Holland mainly, and in England, we lived in furnished houses. But now we had come here permanently to live we wished to have our own house. It is *women* who get things done, you know. We were able to buy a house because of the money I had smuggled out of Germany! I was shown the houses that were available but they were impossible. So I looked around and found some that were not too bad—I quite liked them—and enquired who had designed them. I found that it was Joseph Krantz and so he became our architect. I told him what I wanted. What did other people think? I don't know! Probably they didn't like it but of course they would not have said anything to us. I know one of Charles's schoolfriends told him that his parents thought it was terrible. But we were very happy with it.

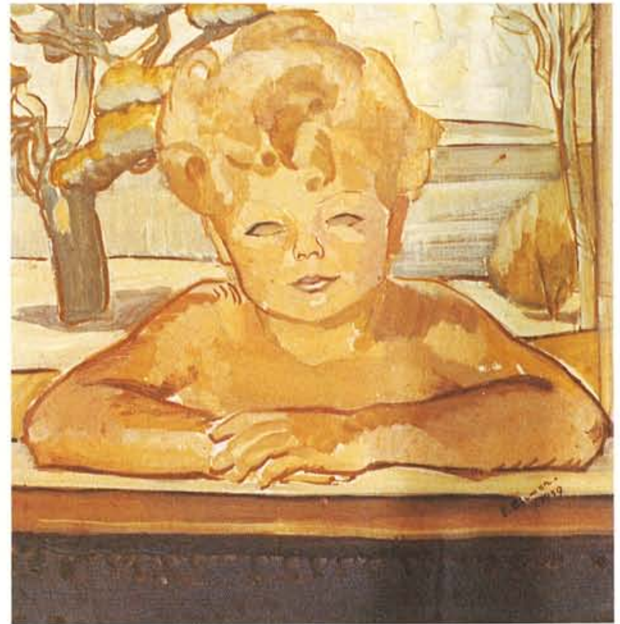
I went shopping to buy furniture. What you could get was all locally made. I said, 'Can you tell me where there is a better shop?' They said, '*We* are the best!' It was hopeless. So I bought only simple beds. The rest *we* did, Charles and I. He was learning woodwork in the school holidays and together we designed it and he made it.

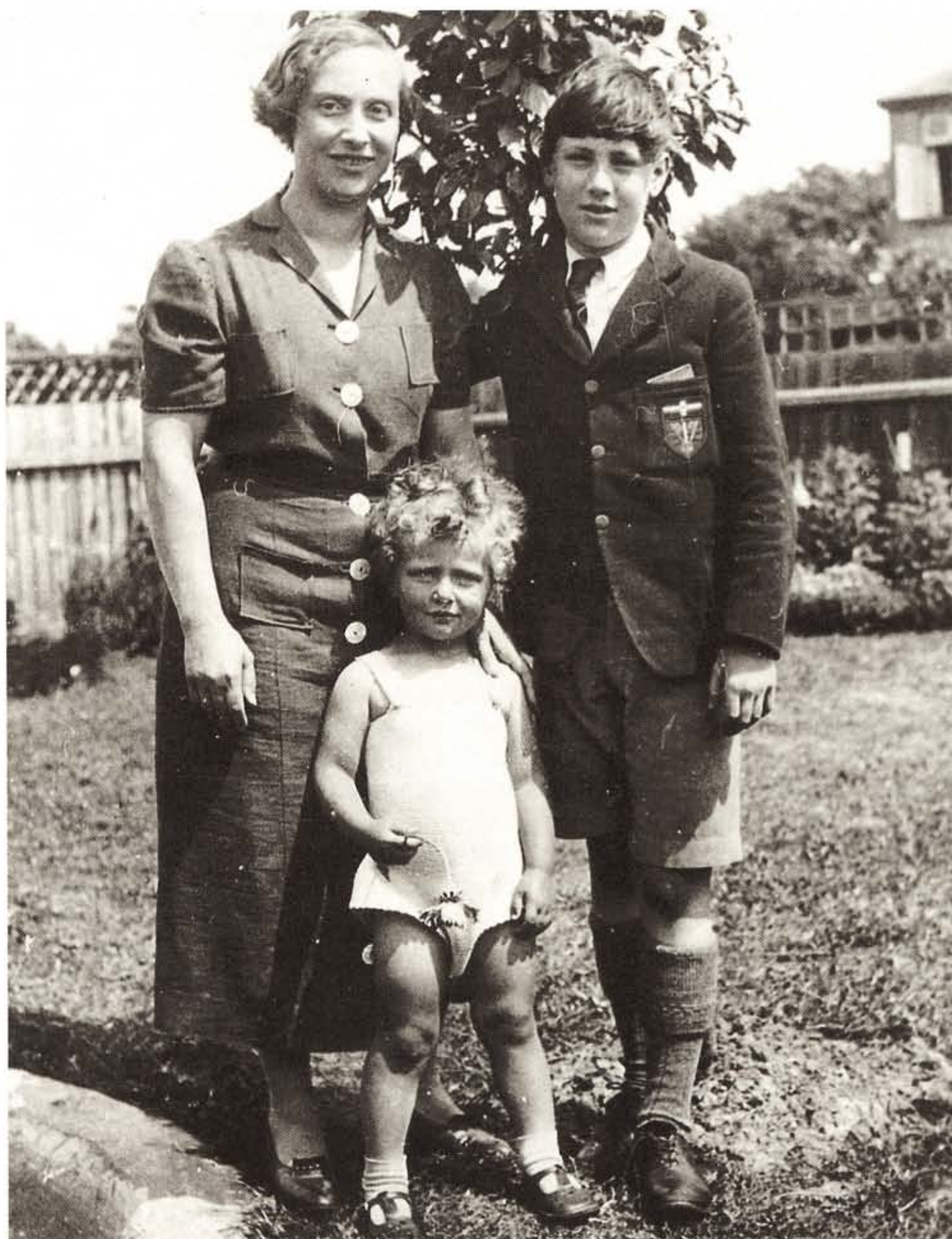
By Christmas we were in the new house. In Hamburg—what Christmases we had! One year I had a complete tool cupboard made for Charles. It was bigger than he was! Here . . . Yes, we had a tree, but the housekeeper was shocked! You know what she said? She said it was heathen! Next year we made sure of putting the tree upstairs where it would not be seen. By now I had a proper housekeeper and I

Below left.
Portrait by Elise Blumann of her thirteen-year-old son, Charles.
BLUMANN COLLECTION

Below right.
Portrait by Elise Blumann of her three-year-old son, Nils.
BLUMANN COLLECTION







Elise Blumann with her sons, Nils and Charles, at Thorpe Bay, Essex, 1937, shortly before they left for Australia.
BLUMANN COLLECTION

could show her what to do. However, to her it was *we* who knew nothing of how to behave and *she* who needed to educate *us*!

I am not saying that it had been better there than it was here: only that this was ... so *different*. You know, these hundred different funny things: they are so unimportant but they matter so much. In Germany, for example, we were accustomed to shaking hands but not with the lower income groups: you just *didn't*. All these little things you had to adapt yourself to. When Charles first went to school here—he went to Scotch College—I asked him why he was getting home later and later each day? He explained that the other boys were stopping him and that each day he had to find a new route home to avoid them. And you know why they were teasing him? Not because he was German: oh no! *Because he sounded like a Pommy.*

NURSING IN SPAIN

AMIRAH INGLIS

'Before the war started in Spain I had set this date—May 1 1938—as a target. For three years I would save all my money, spend my spare time in study, go up the China coast, cross Russia and be in Moscow for May Day', wrote Mary Lowson as she contemplated the strange twists of fate which had led her instead to Spain. She had just returned there, after seven months during which she had crossed Australia from Fremantle to Cairns, arousing Australian consciences about the Spanish war which had been raging for almost two years, and raising money 'for the victims of fascist terror'. Her 'clear, rapid words, ringing with nobility' had revived flagging support for the Spanish Republican government, and she had collected almost £400 by the time she farewelled her last audience. She was returning to Spain at a grim time for the Spanish government.

Mary Lowson was born in Hobart on 11 April 1895, orphaned early and raised by distant relatives. By the mid-thirties she was nursing at Lidcombe state hospital in Sydney, a dismal place where destitute old men were cared for under appalling conditions. She pondered this misery, read books and attended plays, and joined the Communist party. A tiny, sturdy and robust woman, she was also impatient, strong-willed and certain she was right. Soon after the Spanish generals' revolt began in mid-July 1936 she had gone to a public meeting 'to find out what was happening', and when the meeting decided to send a 'Red Cross unit' to nurse for the Republican government, Mary volunteered on the spot. She soon recruited two fellow nurses from Lidcombe, May Macfarlane, a Western Australian who

Standing, Sisters Agnes Hodgson (left) and May Macfarlane. Sitting, Sisters Una Wilson (left) and Mary Lowson. Spanish Relief Committee, From the battlefields of Spain *Sydney 1938.*

I.A.H. TURNER COLLECTION, ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

Pix, 3 Dec 1938.

This Exclusive series of pictures presents the harsh realism of war in Spain. Taken during the bitter fighting on the Ebro when the Loyalists successfully advanced against the Francoist forces, this picture shows wounded members of the International Brigade, now disbanded, returning to base hospitals.

Wounded Government soldier receives treatment on Ebro front. When Franco threatened Valencia, the Loyalist troops made a lightning attack and crossed the river Ebro. Against terrific aerial and artillery bombardment they maintained their position and diverted Franco's attack on Valencia.

Front cover of the pamphlet containing letters from the nurses' unit and extracts from Una Wilson's diary which was produced in Sydney and circulated throughout Australia.

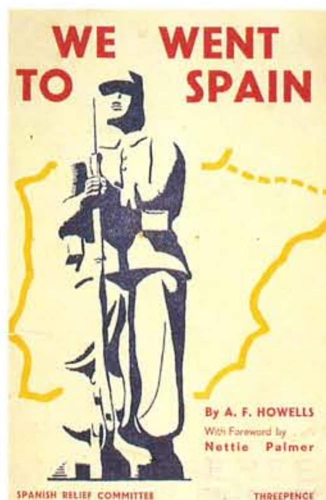
I.A.H. TURNER COLLECTION, ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

had joined the Communist party in 1936, and New Zealand born Una Wilson. Then a fourth nurse, Agnes Hodgson of Melbourne, volunteered. They arrived in Barcelona at the end of November 1936.

Now, eighteen months later, Mary was back in Barcelona, her return fare of almost £60 paid for, as before, by the Spanish Relief Committee in Australia on the understanding that she could go to a hospital and nurse. She had spent her first tour of duty in Spain organising the placement of the three Australian nurses in a hospital at Benecassim on the glorious Castellon coast, going to France to buy food for Spanish hospitals, and publicising the work of the Australian unit. Her rigid views and the suspicious atmosphere surrounding the communist movement had also led her to join in 'one of the least pleasant features' of life among the international volunteers who arrived to help the Spanish Republic, the 'frequent denunciations' of colleagues as fascist sympathisers. She had split the Australian nurses. May Macfarlane and Una Wilson, the two Lidcombe nurses, went with her to Benecassim, but Agnes Hodgson—whom Mary had not recruited personally—was left in Barcelona to fend for herself.

While Mary was absent campaigning for support in Australia in late 1937 and early 1938, May and Una had continued front-line nursing. They 'went through untold hardships', working very long hours, being bombed, and suffering the horrors of the battles of Belchite and Teruel. By New Year 1938 they had been

separated: Una was in the snow on the hills of the Teruel front; May was on the flat and dreary plains of la Mancha, at the Albacete headquarters of the International Brigade. Both were full of praise for the bravery of the men they nursed, and inspired by the nobility and self-sacrifice of the doctors with whom they worked. Both experienced, too, the awful fear of betrayal which beset the Brigade. The Belgian surgeon Dumont, with whom Una worked, was denounced by a medical student volunteer as a 'secret fascist sent to Spain to kill as many wounded as he could', and May was told to watch another Brigade doctor similarly suspected. The strain of this, on top of the strain of front-line nursing, wore her out, and she suffered a breakdown that sent her to London in late January. After eight weeks recuperating in England, May returned to Spain in April, going first to Barcelona, the capital now that rebel troops had cut the Republic in two, then to a hospital at Mataro, twenty kilometres up the coast. Here she nursed during the attack on the Ebro River, the last Republican offensive: 'I have been working without nursing help in a ward of 68 wounded—working all day and every day ... The hospital has been full ever since the Ebro offensive started', she wrote on 5 October. She was there when she heard that the International Brigade was to be withdrawn from Spain. She left more abruptly than she would have liked, and earlier than the main body of surviving International Brigaders, when she was sent to accompany a train load of wounded Frenchmen to Paris.



Arthur Howells and his wife, members of the Council Against War and Fascism in Melbourne, volunteered for Spain in 1936 but were rejected on the grounds that there was a glut of unskilled fighters in Spain. In 1938 they were finally allowed to go. They arrived in Europe after the decision to withdraw all volunteers had been taken but remained long enough to investigate front lines, children's colonies, hospitals and factories. On their return they wrote this pamphlet.

P.T. THORNE COLLECTION, ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

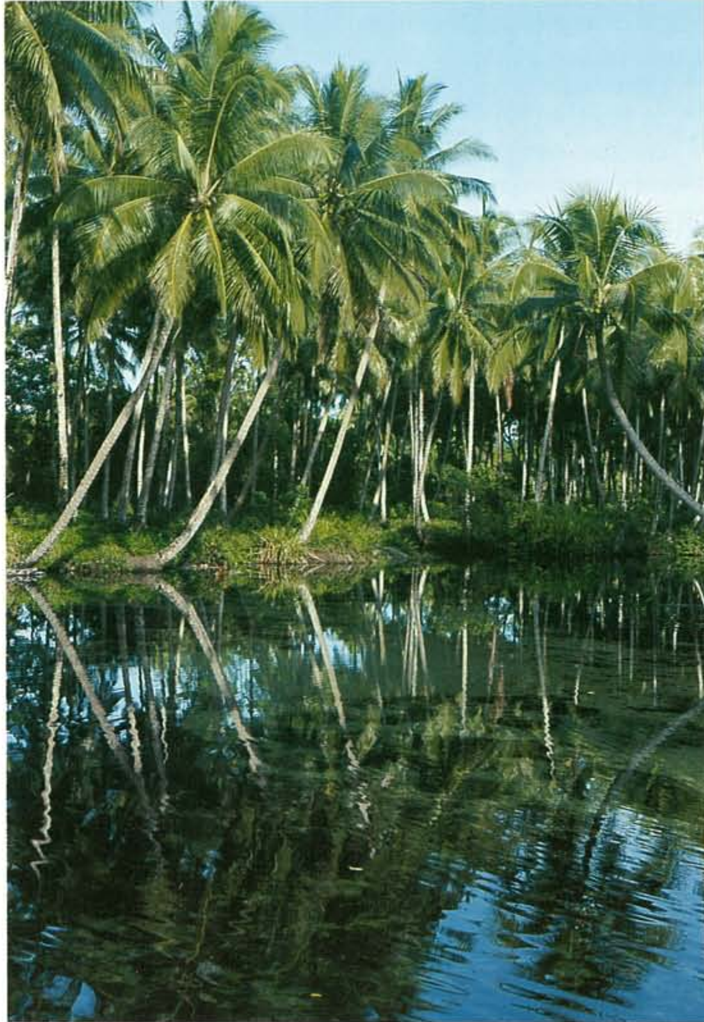
Una Wilson also left Spain before Mary Lowson returned. After three months nursing in a small village about eight kilometres from Teruel, subjected to daily bombing and machine gun fire, she had travelled to London early in 1938, to recuperate and to write her diary into a book. She stayed until September, and was on her way back when she heard of the withdrawal of the International Brigaders. 'A sudden death with a bomb, or a bullet was all I imagined for myself in the future', she declared soon after. The Relief Committee in Sydney sent her a fare home.

Agnes Hodgson, left behind in Barcelona, had eventually been attached to a British nursing team working in hospitals at Granen and Polenino near the Huesca front and, in her last weeks, had moved to a dressing station very close to that front, where streams of wounded arrived continuously. After her return from Spain she spoke on public platforms in Melbourne and Sydney, was interviewed by press and radio, and wrote for the daily papers about the war. 'What I have seen in Spain has made me a militant pacifist forever ...', she wrote on 14 October. 'One of the few beliefs left to me is in the honesty of the Spanish Republican Government. Honesty to its people and its neighbours.' She shared with the other nurses the conviction that the Spanish war was the first blow in the fight against fascism.

Lion-hearted and troublesome, Mary Lowson, alone among the four Australian nurses, was still in Spain as 1938 ended, nursing Republican wounded as their shattered forces withdrew before Franco's triumphant advance on Barcelona.

This photograph of May Macfarlane, who was known as 'Mac', was published in the health workers' journal, La Voz de la Sanidad *(Health voice).*

A. INGLIS COLLECTION



Coconuts palms near Konos, central New Ireland. About 5000 coconuts produced one ton of copra, and New Ireland produced 30 per cent of New Guinea's copra exports for 1938. These totalled 65 000 tons (78 000 tonnes), making copra the Territory's major cash crop. Photograph by Bill Gammage.