# Negotiating a Home: Henry Rothschild and the Émigré Experience

**Janine Barker**

Henry Rothschild was among the first ‘Hitler émigrés’, leaving Germany in 1933 for university life in Cambridge. Rothschild went on to become one of the most significant figures in post-war craft, setting up his shop Primavera in London, and then Cambridge. He was a retailer, exhibitor, collector and patron of craft, particularly in the field of ceramics. This chapter examines the experience of Rothschild alongside the other European émigrés who came to Britain, considering to what extent they carried with them a national or cultural identity, and how this identity impacted on their engagement with the cultural life of Britain.

At the core of the analysis presented in this article is the acknowledgement that although there may be some commonalities between the experiences of émigrés, each émigré has a unique and individual narrative.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is straightforward to consider the implications of nationality, whether the émigré has come from Germany, Austria or Poland for instance. For those of Jewish descent, it is important to differentiate between Orthodox, Conservative and Liberal Judaism and to what extent their identification with the Jewish faith and community impacted on their experience of having to leave their country of origin, and of settling into British life. Gender, age, wealth and education also have a bearing on the émigré experience. Even within these demarcations of experience, each person will have had an individual response to it. The difficulty lies in offering an account of that experience using the evidence at hand, whilst being aware that such an account will never fully reflect every individual narrative. In his memoir *Confronting History*, the historian George Mosse succinctly states:

My life reflects the often cataclysmic events of our time, but it is still a personal life: these events are filtered through my own perceptions and experiences. Some of these were only to be expected, but others were contrary to the usual, normative reactions especially in the case of my experience of exile. I cannot claim to be truly typical for anyone but myself.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Born in Frankfurt in 1913, Henry Rothschild enjoyed a middle class upbringing. His father Albert, along with his brothers, ran the family’s scrap metal business, J. Adler’s, which operated on an international scale. It was at his father’s insistence that he studied Chemistry at Frankfurt University; had he been allowed to follow his own ambition he would have chosen History of Art. With the rise of the Nazi Party, Rothschild left Germany for Britain in 1933 and continued his studies at Caius College, Cambridge. He became a British citizen in 1938 and joined the Signal Corps. During his time with the Army he travelled to Italy. Seeing the work of local craftsmen, it was this experience which first gave him the idea to pursue a career in craft. On leaving the Army in 1945 he sought out craft workers in Britain and in 1946 he opened Primavera in London, a unique venture which sold and promoted craft from ceramics to textiles to handmade toys. He expanded, opening another shop in Cambridge in 1960 before handing over ownership in 1980. It is this experience as a German-Jewish émigré, as surmised from the existing evidence, which will be the main case study used here. In order to show the complexity of that experience, it will be placed alongside the accounts of other émigrés, and within the broader narratives posited by historians and sociologists. The main focus will be on émigrés from Germany as this was Rothschild’s country of origin, although efforts have been made to include émigrés from other nations where possible. The aim of this examination will be to demonstrate to what degree Rothschild’s experience as an émigré was unique or normative in comparison with the experiences of other émigrés who came to Britain during this time.

According to Harzig and Hoerder, the concept of nation states reached its pinnacle between 1880 and 1920. It was during this period that the autonomy and dominance of the established empires began to be challenged by those under their rule and anti-imperialist movements began to take hold. This resulted in the questioning of identity, whether a person was part of an empire or a nation. In a more practical sense, the concept of nation led to the growing control over physical borders and boundaries which limited geographical movement.

Nationalism became aggressive; unconditional adherence to ‘the nation’ became a virtue. Under dynastic regimes, migrants had negotiated their status with the ruler of the society of destination, and they could ‘belong’ by swearing allegiance. Under nation-state regimes, and with, by the 1880s, the introduction of citizenship and passport legislation, entry regulations became far more restrictive […][[3]](#endnote-3)

Harzig and Hoerder go on to state that in order for the migrant to be accepted into the host nation, a process of assimilation would have to occur. In its broadest sense assimilation means that the cultural and national identity of the host country would have to be adopted and be seen to supersede the cultural and national identity associated with the home country. The reality of assimilation is of course more complex. People do not carry with them values or beliefs that can be easily exchanged, but rather a negotiation takes place, and it is up to the individual and the country of destination to decide the terms of that negotiation.

Assimilation – when it is not forced but rather left to the individual – can allow a migrant to retain something of their own identity and merge it with the identity of the host nation. Part of this negotiation might be the development of a public and a private identity, for example the honouring of religious tradition in the home but not being markedly religious in public. Migrant history is so diverse that no doubt this is possible in some circumstances.[[4]](#endnote-4) However, in other circumstances - dependent on the host nation, the home nation, the relationship between the two, or the reasons for the movement – the old national identity would have to be completely replaced by a new identity and any evidence of allegiance to a home nation could be dangerous. It could be argued that émigrés and exiles demonstrate the complexity and nuances of cultural and national identity because their movement, their relocation and their attempts to settle highlight that such identities are social constructs, subject to careful negotiation. By considering the movement of those who moved from mainland Europe to Britain in the 1930s, from their position at home to their position abroad, it is possible to examine the effects these negotiations had on individuals and explore to what extent they carried that with them throughout their life.

Typical portrayals of Weimar Germany are largely informed by popular culture – the films of Marlene Dietrich and Josef von Sternberg, the novels of Christopher Isherwood, the plays of Bertolt Brecht – all of which paint an image of a decadent, culturally rich society, embracing progress and change. For Karl Fuhrer this image does not give an accurate depiction of the reality of Weimar:

[…] our understanding of Weimar culture is incomplete without a grasp of broader patterns of cultural production and consumption, and skewed if it does not take into account the conservative tastes and the forces of tradition which also characterized it. Seen from this broader perspective, the cultural life of the republic emerges as less spectacular and less experimental than it appears in many accounts.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The absence of this conservatism from the popular Weimar narrative is largely due to the tendency to view it from the other side of Nazi Germany; that is to see it as markedly different to what was to follow, as if to make the events in Nazi Germany all the more devastating. This is not to say this popular image was a myth; Weimar Germany was highly invested in the promotion of culture and art, particularly with regards to the theatre. Germany during this period prided itself on being a *Kulturnation*, a nation of culture. Rothschild refers to this period as one of ‘cultural flowering’ which, considering his young age at the time (7 years old in 1920) seems a remarkable observation to make, even in hindsight.[[6]](#endnote-6) In more detail he notes a particular exhibition – *From Realism to Symbolism* – which he visited at the Festival Hall in Frankfurt in the early 1920s:

I lived there and knew many pictures by heart and see them today: *Dr Cachet* by Van Gogh and the vases and fields, Gauguin landscapes, Nolde, Kirchner and others of the German Expressionists. A mist of colours and splendidly heavy. Germany the outcast after war defeat was busy, anxious and successful in presenting art, literature, theatre and culture connecting with Europe and the World. The scale and scope of these exhibitions which I only saw in Frankfurt was truly grandiose.[[7]](#endnote-7)

That this event stayed with him throughout his life demonstrates his strong engagement with the visual arts from an early age; he remarks that his earliest memories are of collecting little objects then displaying them for his mother.[[8]](#endnote-8) Indeed, when he arrived at Caius College, Cambridge in September 1933, he often attended History of Art lectures alongside his official timetable. That his studies ended with a third class degree is perhaps of little surprise. Although in Rothschild’s case his mother was more encouraging than his father in his pursuit of the arts, his attendance at exhibitions from an early age suggests that, at least for the middle classes, such encouragement to engage was fairly commonplace. Rothschild’s cousin, Louise Rothschild-Graumann, also recollects visiting the theatre and opera:

To these performances, both opera and drama, I also often went, either because my father was travelling and my mother did not want to go alone or because my parents had other obligations that evening. My mother did not like opera. She used to make fun of it. “They sing, ‘Let us flee, let us flee’, for ten minutes and, of course, by then it is too late and the villain gets them. Or they sing, ‘I am dying’ for a long time. Who can sing when they are dying?” So often I went with my father who loved opera, and I saw the whole classic repertoire when I was young. My father, who had never had a formal musical education, could hum all tunes of symphonies or operas, often not knowing what he was humming. My first opera was *Hansel and Gretel* by Humperdinck and I was totally overwhelmed, my second a musical version of *Peter Pan*.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Although five years younger than Rothschild, George Mosse states, rather dismissively, that: ‘I was considered much too young to take part in the cultural life of Berlin at the time […] To be sure, like other children, I was taken to the opera […] but never to the theatre’.[[10]](#endnote-10) What is interesting about this statement is the assumption that attending the opera is a normative experience. Like Rothschild and his cousin Louise, Mosse came from a middle-class background and it is that background that makes such attendance appear ordinary. For the lower classes access to culture would have been limited. What is most significant, however, is that German-Jewish identity during this period, particularly for those of the middle and upper classes, was tied up in an engagement with culture.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Anthony Grenville and Irene Wells argue that the assimilated Jews of Germany and Austria – who viewed their faith as a tradition, but who were by and large secularised - saw culture as a stand-in for religion, a ‘vehicle of assimilation, the means by which Jewish families could climb the social ladder and […] could leave the world of trade and commerce for the academic and independent professions’.[[12]](#endnote-12) Certainly for the Rothschild family, who observed the traditions of their faith but who were effectively assimilated into German life, engagement with culture was a way of life. However, religion still remained a significant part of their identity. Rothschild himself states in an interview that he never felt any particular warmth towards the Jewish religion and yet he observed Jewish tradition throughout his life.[[13]](#endnote-13) Talking about her father, Liz Rothschild states:

I think they were the same kind of Jews that Christians are that go to Church on Christmas Day and Easter and obviously expect to have their children baptised, but it doesn’t mean that actually they feel in anyway profoundly Christian […] The thing about being Jewish is that there’s a sort of cultural identity with that as well in certain ways. You know, or cultural values. And some of those cultural values I would say Dad certainly demonstrated. […] It’s that very complicated thing […] And Dad did always celebrate the high holidays and we went to my cousin Hilde, the one he grew up with and the one who moved to London […] and she always kept a kosher house and she celebrated the high holidays and we went there and Dad always marked kosher, marked Yom Kippur, all his life, except until the very, very end when he started going to Quakers. So, something remained that mattered. And he studied the Talmud and the Bible with the rabbinical commentaries and things in later life, and wanted to be buried the next day immediately after he died which is a Jewish tradition. So, it’s complicated what you are.[[14]](#endnote-14)

It is such paradoxes that muddy the waters when we enter into debates on a person’s identity; if Rothschild’s Jewishness did not count for much in his own life, why should it be the subject of discussion here? When considering his Jewishness as a religious or racial marker, it is included here as it was his Jewish identity which resulted in his life being pushed in the direction that it was, having to flee a Germany which placed a higher emphasis on his Jewishness then he did. Arguably it was also his Jewish cultural background which gave him the grounding and knowledge that then went on to inform his future work and practice when selling and exhibiting craft through Primavera.

The first emigration of those Europeans who were fleeing persecution began in 1933. For many, it was a move across the border into Western Europe, mainly France, Holland and Czechoslovakia. From January 1933 to April 1934 no more than 3000 crossed the Channel to Britain. This increased as the decade moved on, although the Americas and Palestine were more popular destinations. However, from 1938, largely due to the Austrian *Anschluss*, these numbers increased; the outbreak of war in 1939 restricted any further movement and so those who had only intended to stay in Britain temporarily had to remain. Rothschild was among those early émigrés. In 1932 he had begun reading chemistry at Frankfurt University. It was not a subject close to his heart but he worked hard at it, bringing his experiments home to work on in his makeshift lab in an attempt to keep up with his classmates. In a fairly matter of fact way, Rothschild recalls the encounter which prompted his departure:

One day my lab boss I believe Dr Klee called me into his room. He was a Nazi but we had always got on. He said, ‘Rothschild what are you going to do? Get out if you can there is no future chance for you’.[[15]](#endnote-15)

In 1933 Henry Rothschild found that his German identity had become superseded by his Jewish identity. This tension between national identity and religious/racial identity has occurred repeatedly throughout history but the policies of the National Socialists gave a legal backing to it - in the eyes of the law you were no longer a German citizen if you were Jewish. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 formalised these changes and deemed that you could be a *Reichsbürger*, a pure blood citizen, or a *Staatsangehöriger*, everyone else.[[16]](#endnote-16) Rothschild's father, Albert Rothschild, held a position as a valued industrialist and considered himself to be a loyal German national; the rise of Nazism however resulted in his being viewed as the only thing that counted: Jewish. In his journal, which runs sporadically from 1923 - 1934, he commented on the anti-Semitism rife in German society and dissects the cultural idea of ‘being a Jew’. In April 1934 he wrote: ‘In the new dogma, the Jew is a stranger in Germany, [he] doesn't belong to the Aryan race and is therefore inferior’.[[17]](#endnote-17) Similar sentiments are echoed by George Mosse in his memoir:

My family, like most other Jewish families, considered themselves German without giving it another thought. What else could they have been? […] I myself never doubted that I was German, until well into exile. That I feel compelled today to state this fact seems to me an example of how looking back from one time to another can distort history.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Both Albert Rothschild’s and George Mosse’s accounts suggest that the reconciliation between being Jewish and being German was a relatively easy one in the inter-war period, at least for the Jews themselves, and that their perceived otherness was not profoundly felt. It is difficult to imagine then, in the space of a few years, how it would have been to be removed physically, emotionally and mentally from a society that had previously formed part of one’s identity.

German Jews continued to leave throughout the 1930s, as the restrictions to their lives became tighter and the danger they were in became more keenly felt. There were those, however, who held on to a belief that the German people, belonging to a civilised country, a country of progress, would turn against the Nazi party and Hitler would fall. Remarkably this was a belief held by some right up until 1938. Margarete Hinrichsen recalls her parents trying to persuade her to return to Germany from Britain in June 1938, her father maintaining the confidence that it would all blow over - Hinrichsen stayed in Britain and her father died in the events of *Kristallnacht*.[[19]](#endnote-19) Rothschild remarks on his own father’s views on the situation: ‘my father found all this Hitler business very hard to swallow because he had always considered himself a German, accepted, successful and then suddenly it all came to nought’.[[20]](#endnote-20) Although it was his father’s ill health which prevented his leaving rather than any dogged belief that things could change for the better, such ruminations demonstrate the level of disbelief at what was happening.

Hans Coper was amongst those Germans who left at the very last opportunity in 1939. His Jewish father had committed suicide three years earlier and his Aryan mother decided to remain in Dresden. Aged 19, Coper secured a sponsor in Britain and left Germany by train. At one point during his journey the train was stopped and boarded by the Gestapo; Coper hid his papers under his seat and climbed out the window, climbing back through once the train started to move. When Hans arrived in Britain his sponsor claimed to have no room for him, resulting in his finding lodgings which were a far cry from his middle-class upbringing in Germany.[[21]](#endnote-21) After the war Coper, a trained engineer, went on to become a potter of great talent of whom Rothschild was a tremendous supporter, giving him a solo exhibition in 1958.

The issue of class is highly significant when it came to being able to leave Europe. It is important to note that not all German Jews came from the middle-class background of Rothschild, Coper or of Mosse and, as such, did not always have the means to leave. In her research on British immigration policy Louise London examines the impact of the mass migration of Jews from Europe. London raises some pertinent issues which relate to the circumstances in which Rothschild and his contemporaries would have found himself in during this period of movement and settlement.

To escape from the Nazis, resourcefulness and money and support from family, friends and strangers were necessary, but rarely sufficient. Jewish organisations played the major part in organising emigration, raising funds and persuading governments to expand the possibilities of asylum.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Research shows that Rothschild was fortunate enough to be supported by his family and that he had contact with people already in Britain who could offer support, notably Harold Stannard who helped him get a place at Cambridge University, and his older brother Hermann Rothschild. This was not the case for those without means. London’s research indicates that there were 500,000 to 600,000 cases of families and individuals seeking refuge and around 80,000 of those were actually admitted: ‘the conclusion cannot be avoided: escape to Britain was an exception for a lucky few; exclusion was the fate of the majority’.[[23]](#endnote-23) Although such figures vary from study to study, what is made apparent is that admission was the exception rather than the rule and as such Rothschild was one of these ‘lucky few’, and it would be appear the support of family money and position did go some way towards his having this advantage. In the introductory chapter to Grenville and Malet’s *Changing Countries*, Grenville highlights the fact that of the 28 Jewish interviewees used in the study, the majority come from a middle-class background; to Grenville this is not a deliberate act nor is it coincidental – it illustrates that the poorer Jews, particularly from Eastern Europe, were more likely to remain in Europe and that the higher incidence of middle-class émigrés in the study ‘points to important conclusions regarding the type of people who were best placed to make their escape from Nazi Germany’.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Since Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, Austria had been holding its breath to see what was going to happen next. As had happened in Germany, there were many Austrians who believed Hitler and the Nazi party to be temporary, a government that would soon pass into history, and certainly not a party that would have any influence in Austria. There were others who anticipated the changes that were to come. In Lore Segal’s memoir, *Other People’s Houses*, she recalls her Uncle Peter’s comments, made in 1937, on those who were in denial over what was happening:

“We Jews are a remarkable people,” Paul said. “Our neighbour tells us he’s getting his gun out for us, and we sit watching him polish and load it and train it at our heads and we say, he doesn’t really mean us”.[[25]](#endnote-25)

By the late 1930s there were an estimated 185,000 Jews living in Austria, the vast majority in Vienna. It was in Vienna where Lucie Rie and her husband Hans lived. Rie was already established as a potter of some note, exhibiting and selling across Europe and in America. In 1937 she exhibited in the Austrian Pavilion at the *Paris Exposition Internationale*; in the same year Pablo Picasso exhibited his painting *Guernica* at the Spanish Pavilion. On the 10th March 1938 Rie, among others, was awarded a medal for her contribution to the Exposition; two days later the Nazis marched into Austria. In his biography of Rie, Emmanuel Cooper writes:

Despite the wet weather Hitler’s entry into the city [Vienna] was triumphant. As his motorcade passed through the old Habsburg quarter, the streets, bedecked by bunting were lined with hundreds of thousands of waving euphoric Viennese, the church bells ringing in celebration. Terrified by the open display of jubilation, Jews stayed at home behind tightly closed doors in an attempt to protect themselves and shut out the frenzy. Lucie, safely in the flat, heard the shouting with mounting dismay. To divert her attention she read *Gone with the Wind* […] imagining perhaps that she was Scarlett O’Hara in another place at another time […][[26]](#endnote-26)

The *Anschluss* prompted another wave of emigration. The appropriation of Jewish businesses had been building momentum in Germany since 1933; in Austria it took a matter of months, aided by fervent brutality. This culminated in *Kristallnacht* in November 1938. In the oral history project which forms the basis for *Changing Countries*, eight of the respondents were Austrian, seven of which were Jewish. Despite this small sample, the experiences of the *Anschluss* are diverse. Gertrud Wengraf, a student at Vienna forced to abandon her studies, recalls being made to scrub the pavement along with other Jews who had just been walking through the park. In contrast Mimi Glover had been able to finish her studies prior to the *Anschluss* and was already making arrangements to leave; there were very few Jews where she lodged in Sievering and thereby very little trouble.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Throughout this period Rothschild’s parents remained in Frankfurt. As part of the naturalisation process to acquire British citizenship it was necessary to post a notice of intent in *The Times*. In May 1938 Rothschild wrote a letter to the Home Office asking if such an announcement could be avoided. He stated that:

My father, who lives in Frankfurt, is an elderly man, whose health is now seriously impaired, and I should never be surprised to receive an urgent summons to return home. The Germans have already made difficulties about renewing my passport, and would almost certainly cancel it if my desire to become a British subject were brought to their notice.[[28]](#endnote-28)

As it was, his father died that same month and there is no evidence to suggest he returned home. It seems risky that he even considered the possibility of returning home at this time but of course such observations are made with hindsight. Liz Rothschild is of the understanding that her father wanted both his parents to leave Germany, following their children either to Britain or America, but it was Albert’s ill health that prevented the move. With his passing, Rothschild was able to persuade his mother to leave, which she did, quickly joining him and his brother in London. Despite the family’s wealth and connections not all escaped. Albert’s brother Max, along with his wife and eldest son Wilhelm, died in a camp, as did his cousin Lotte and her daughter Ruth. Lotte’s sister, Louise Graumann was also in a concentration camp but survived and lived out her life in America.[[29]](#endnote-29) For those who did manage the journey, be it in 1933 or 1939, from Germany or Austria or Czechoslovakia, a new set of challenges faced them. Entry into Britain was not straightforward, nor was finding work or a home.

As a capital city, London was unquestionably at the centre of émigré activity in Britain. Many German and Austrian refugees moved into middle- and upper-class areas of London, primarily in the North and North-West districts, ‘their meagre incomes notwithstanding, the German refugees maintained their middle class lifestyle as far as possible’.[[30]](#endnote-30) In the Hampstead area of the present Borough of Camden there existed a ‘colony’ of German speakers, including the exiled screenwriter Carl Mayer. This area also become home to the immigrant organisation the *Freie Deutsche Kulturbund –* the Free German League of Culture.[[31]](#endnote-31) Jewish communities were focused around the West London Synagogue in Upper Berkeley Street and the Central Synagogue in Great Portland Street, both of which were relatively short distances from the upper middle-class area of Sloane Street in the Kensington-Chelsea district, where Rothschild would later set up his craft shop Primavera. It was also around this area that Lucie Rie settled with her husband Hans, when they finally arrived in 1938. Whereas some émigrés found London ‘strange and unfriendly’, Rie was optimistic:

Disconcerting daily occurrences, such as people speaking too quickly for her to understand, electric light switches that had to be flicked rather than turned, bulbs with bayonet rather than screw fittings, and traffic that drove on the ‘wrong’ side of the road were all part of the charm. Less alluring was the relentless hunt for good, strong coffee, to which she was addicted.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Her optimism for a better future seemed to be matched only by her determination to make it work. She took English lessons to improve her language skills. Language was an obvious barrier to assimilation into British society. At one of his first meals at Caius College, Cambridge, Rothschild found himself sitting alone with another student. He recalls that the student had a severe stutter: ‘My limited English and his speech fault made conversation something of a trial. He read Law I believe and after term started by tacit agreement we never really clapped eyes on each other’.[[33]](#endnote-33) Such recollections may seem rather trivial but for some the difficulty in communication further heightened the feelings of not belonging. For others, the English language was quickly adopted. On his arrival in 1939, Hans Coper found himself lodging near the Slade School and opposite the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. It is not known how well Coper spoke English on arrival but, as he would later show with regards to his pottery, he developed his language skills quickly, learning primarily through his role as a prompter at the Academy. Throughout his life he spoke English with no trace of a German accent and only spoke German on occasion.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Many respondents to Berghahn's study remarked that acceptance in Britain was marked by a willingness and ability to fit in with the British way of life. Official publications, such as the German Jewish Aid Committee's *While you are in England: Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee*, encouraged this deference to an ‘English’ lifestyle, but as Berghahn argued this push for enforced assimilation only further exacerbated the feelings of loss. As one respondent explained:

[...] to be told, this is no longer your country, that is bad and it makes you slightly ashamed [...] When we came we could not speak German, one had to whisper; one was an enemy, one was treated as an enemy [...] Then, later, it made a lot of difference as a grown-up not to feel that there was a place really that fully accepted one for what one was.[[35]](#endnote-35)

To feel disregarded and maligned in a country that one hoped to make a home would have undoubtedly left a mark on the psyche of these émigrés, including Rothschild. As evidenced above, Rothschild came to Britain at the ideal time – whether he knew it or not. His brother Hermann was already in London and arranged his lodgings. He spent some time at Chelsea Polytechnic before securing a place at Caius College, Cambridge, to start in the autumn of 1933. His move to Cambridge was not an easy one – his luggage never arrived at his new lodgings and it transpired that the landlady had hidden it from him, pawning the best items. He found it difficult to make friends, being set apart from the typical English student for his Germanness and Jewishness, but feeling equally out of place with the Jewish community.[[36]](#endnote-36)

In 1940 approximately 27,000 German and Austrian émigrés were labelled as enemy aliens and placed in internment camps, either in Britain or another Commonwealth country.[[37]](#endnote-37) Ralph Fraser and his brother were two such individuals, German Jews who were arrested in 1940 as enemy aliens and sent to an internment camp in Canada – they were able to return to Britain on the grounds that they became members of the British Army, swearing allegiance to King and Country.[[38]](#endnote-38) The potter Hans Coper also experienced internment in Canada before returning to Britain in 1941 to join the Pioneer Corps. Due to Rothschild coming to Britain in 1933 he was able to become a British citizen in 1938 and later joined the British Army; the date at which he did this meant he was never considered an enemy alien by the British authorities. His timeliness in this matter was very fortunate:

Until the British declaration of war against Germany on 3 September 1939 the British nationality acts had operated normally *vis-à-vis* the Germans. These acts had permitted foreigners without regard to their origins to apply for naturalisation after five years of residence and, as German emigration had started already in 1933, a few of the first German emigrants after Hitler’s assumption of power just manage to become British subjects before war began. […] Others, who had come a little later, had applied and their applications were in various stages of completion but on commencement of the state of war all naturalisation proceedings stopped and whoever had not taken the oath by that date was still a German.[[39]](#endnote-39)

Rothschild was among the very few refugees to be naturalised during the 1930s due to the restrictions and escalation of events in Europe. The suspension of naturalisation in 1940 left 3,500 applications open, of which 1,600 were refugee cases.[[40]](#endnote-40) With the close of the war in 1945, naturalisation again became possible, although the guidelines regarding who was eligible were unclear and the process was a lengthy one.

In early 1946 the time lag between the submission of an application and its consideration was thought to be two years or more. In July 1948 it emerged that the intervention of other work in the Home Office meant that many orphan refugee children were still awaiting naturalisation, although most of some 800 cases were resolved by early 1949.[[41]](#endnote-41)

The majority of the interviewees for *Changing Countries* went through the naturalisation process. Naturalisation by itself, however, did not result in the instant feeling of being ‘British’. Again, a negotiation had to be made between the old and the new identity and for many this negotiation was ongoing. Certainly Berghahn found this to be the case in her study:

German-Jewish refugees have by now lived in Britain for well over a generation […] This was often pointed out to me by my respondents when I asked them whether or not they felt themselves to be fully-fledged British or English citizens. How could they not, after all those years, was a common reaction. […] But further enquiry revealed that their feelings of identity were rather more complex and did not present a picture of simple progression from ‘Germanness’ to ‘Englishness’, with ‘Jewishness’ adjusted somehow along the way. Nor were attitudes towards Britain or Germany straightforward.[[42]](#endnote-42)

In his study on Jewish refugees, which utilises the publication *AJR Information* as the primary resource, Grenville found that the majority of German and Austrian refugees no longer felt themselves to be German or Austrian, and furthermore had no desire to return to their ‘home’ countries. For many ‘home’ was a place of atrocity and pain which could not be forgotten and the events that had taken place made it unrecognisable.

The German-speaking Jewish refugees had not only suffered the material loss of their homes and familiar surroundings in the way; by destroying the entire communities in which they had lived, the Holocaust had also robbed them of the possibility of re-establishing emotional and spiritual contact with the past.[[43]](#endnote-43)

Rothschild carried these feelings of displacement with him, it seems, for most of his life, his heavy German accent stronger and more evident than the paper that proved his British nationality, the very issue of identity and identification remaining in flux, complex. However, unlike many, Rothschild did return to Germany many times. He made his first return in 1949 remarking: ‘People made me very welcome. I found it very, very tough to be there, you know I really was very unhappy until something like three or four years later I got over it’.[[44]](#endnote-44) In later years, Rothschild worked extensively with German potters and with German institutions, putting on exhibitions and promoting German craftsman. However his brother, Hermann, never returned:

[Henry] forged those new relationships with Germany, and made all that new generation of friends with those German potters, which I think is very significant and speaks very highly of him. Whereas his brother, who is extremely materially motivated, very, very keen on being prosperous, and making money and so on - to be fair possibly because his real interests have been sort of cut off from him so he’s left wanting to succeed with what he’s been given which is to be materially successful, but anyway - for whatever reason, he never would do business with Germany. Never, not in his entire career. And he could have made a lot of money, in the business they were in […] He wouldn’t speak German and he wouldn’t deal with Germany.[[45]](#endnote-45)

Hermann Rothschild was not alone in this position. Hans Coper despite his subsequent international fame as a potter and artist, refused to return to Germany, even for his and Rie's retrospective show in 1980.

However assimilated an émigré became, there often remained a pull towards the familiarity of home. In Rothschild’s case, his social circle was dominated by fellow émigrés, for example the gallery owner William Ohly.[[46]](#endnote-46) Once Primavera opened in early 1946 a number of the people in his employ were émigrés; some were family or were directed to him by friends or family. He was arguably drawn to the work of émigré potters – Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, Ruth Duckworth – because he recognised their style and aestheticism. Of course he also championed the work of British artists, but the work of European and émigré artists forms a key part of his collection. Building these connections and positioning oneself within an émigré community, whether it was intentional or coincidental, was of great importance for many émigrés:

In each of their places of residence, they attempted to connect with key networks, institutions and localities to provide cultural, economic and social stability, but they also aimed to maintain connections with the country from which they had emigrated.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Rothschild’s position as an émigré allowed him a certain amount of freedom in the way he ran Primavera. He embraced the traditional, selling work by Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew and Ray Finch, but he was unburdened by the British preoccupation with nostalgia and demonstrated a passion for the new and innovative; his only concern was that it was ‘good’ craft, demonstrating quality and thought. He stated that ‘Primavera was really interested in anything that was made by hand and not necessarily interested in the particular hand making it’.[[48]](#endnote-48)

The aim of this chapter was to consider Rothschild as an émigré and to what extent that experience impacted on his life and his work. By comparing his own narrative to those of other émigrés it becomes apparent that he benefitted greatly from his family background in Germany, as did many others. Also in evidence is the role that luck often played – for Hans Coper managing to climb back on to his train, and for Rothschild narrowingly avoiding internment just as British policy changed. Undoubtedly Rothschild remained a European and an émigré all his life, in outlook and conviction. Fiona Adamczewski, an employee at Primavera and an émigré herself from a South Africa under apartheid, reflects on the impact such a position had for them both:

I mean he was essentially a European really. Sophisticated, without illusions. God knows he’d lived through some stuff […] It’s always horrible to watch your country turn into a fascist state and I think once it’s happened and you’ve had to go you are then in a certain sense a displaced person forever more. In my case I would say I love England, I love living here, I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else, I’m very grateful that they have me and I’m sure Henry felt the same. He’d been in the army and everything of course as you probably know. But I think you get out of those experiences a certain kind of detachment growth. It cannot but grow because if you weren’t – it’s difficult to express really. I think if you were focused all the time on what you’d lost you would just die, you know. You couldn’t bear it. So you’ve got to put all your energy into other things or if you have any sense you do and he was a survivor.[[49]](#endnote-49)

For Henry Rothschild, his energies were spent on the development of Primavera and on the championing of quality craft. The exposure to culture during his formative years in Germany, as well as his experiences in Italy during the war, provided him with the cultural and aesthetic knowledge he needed to make Primavera the success it was. His position as an émigré in Britain meant he felt little affinity with the established rules of craft, making Primavera a unique venture in post-war Britain.

1. **Notes**

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