



Lesson Title:  
**Working in Britain: Economic  
Opportunities for War Refugees**

***Print outs***

# To stay, go home or try somewhere new?

What would make it hard for people to stay in Britain, return home or try somewhere new? Think of at least three reasons for each.

Stay in Britain	Return Home	Try Somewhere New

## **Eugene Black**

Main challenges:

How much agency did they have to make their own decisions?

Importance of building a career?

Did their careers help them?

## **Alfred Batzdorf**

Main challenges:

How much agency did they have to make their own decisions?

Importance of building a career?

Did their careers help them?

## **Frida Laird**

Main challenges:

How much agency did they have to make their own decisions?

Importance of building a career?

Did their careers help them?

## **The Kagans**

Main challenges:

How much agency did they have to make their own decisions?

Importance of building a career?

Did their careers help them?

# Case Study 1 – Eugene Black

# Eugene Black (Jeno Schwarcz), Northern England

- Eugene was a Hungarian Jew, who was captured and sent to various camps at just age 16 years old. His entire family was killed
- After being liberated from Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Eugene worked as an interpreter for the British army in Germany. He then met Annie, an Englishwoman, who was a secretary and he followed her to England in 1949. They married a year later (and eventually had 4 children).
- At just 22 years old, Eugene was now in England. He had no formal training or vocation, having been just a teenager when he was imprisoned. Having survived a violent war and losing many relatives, Eugene was not sure what he should do for work.
- During an interview, Eugene remembers...

# Eugene Black (Jeno Schwarcz), Northern England

*“Within a few weeks (of arriving in England) I got a telegram [from a friend] to go to Manchester I managed to get an interview. I went for an interview, I had to go for a medical then I got a job in the warehouse. So we (my wife and I) came down, we found two rooms which we had no money for, but we arrived and I started in Marks and Spencer as a warehouse man. And then after five months I was asked to go into the production room, we had a cafeteria there and I worked in there and then they trained me to be a merchandiser. And to cut a story short slowly I worked myself up, I moved from Manchester, I worked there seven years then I moved to Edinburgh and eventually I became a manager and I moved around. I worked 35 years for them and retired in 1985 after 35 years of work. So I’ve been (here) 59 years. I’ve had a hard life but a good life. Because my experience taught me how to behave, how to live my honest good life and thank God, which I’m using the word now because I believe in it now. It’s very important if you’ve got an opportunity to grab it and make the best of it.”*

Eugene Black, Holocaust Centre North

# Case Study 2 – Frida Laird

# Frida Laird (née Hallheimer), Scotland

- Arriving in Leith, Edinburgh in 1939 at just 18 years old as a refugee on a domestic migrant visa from Germany, Frida began working as a nanny for wealthy families (she spoke some English)
- While working for a family in Ayrshire, she met and married, George, when she was 21 years old. He was a joiner. They had 5 children and lived in Paisley
- The marriage ended, leaving Frida alone to support her 5 children
- Frida's entire family in Germany were killed in the Holocaust, so she had no support



Paisley town centre, 1900s,  
*Renfrewshire Tourism website*



# Frida Laird (née Hallheimer), Scotland

- In order to survive, Frida became a pedlar and then made jewellery. Listen to her 2013 interview with *Gathering the Voices* [here](#) (2m05s to 3m05s). She recounts:

FL: *“I got the mounts and set the stones in and made my own jewellery. And seemingly they were quite nice because one gentleman, when I went to his house, to sell to his wife, you know, he said to me; ‘I’ll take you to the ‘... one of the, you know, that place in the town, I can’t remember now. It was...”*

INT: *“One of the places where you can buy some of the stones?”*

FL: *“Yes, he said; ‘You should be able to sell them to the shops’. But the shops wouldn’t buy them because they get them wholesale themselves and things like that so I didn’t bother. I just sold them to friends, made a coffee afternoon. [...] I made brooches. I set brooches and necklaces...”*

# Case Study 3 – Alfred Batzdorf

# Alfred Batzdorff, England

- After teenage Alfred was arrested for being Jewish during the November pogroms ('Kristallnacht') in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland), his parents wanted him out of Germany. So he came to England on the Kindertransport in Nov 1938, aged 16
- Working as a waiter in Dorset, Alfred worked tirelessly to get his German parents visas to England. The long-term goal was to go to the USA, where his extended family lived.
- However, Alfred speaks about his family's decision to emigrate to the USA after spending a year in the UK...

# Alfred Batzdorff, England

- View interview at [USHMM](#), Segment 116, 1:55:05 to 1:57:36



“

IN: *“When was it that your family’s entry into the United States became possible?”*

AB: *“In June, June 40.”*

IN: *“June of 40? But they arrived in England at that same time.”*

AB: *“No 39.”*

IN: *“Oh, June 39.”*

AB: *“I went to England November 1938... we couldn’t have gotten out in 1940. The war was on...”*

IN: *“They were there a whole year then?”*

AB: *“They were there one year, I was there a year and a half (November 1938 to June 1940).”*

IN: *“I could see how you’d be settled in. Did they make a good adjustment during that year?”*

# Alfred Batzdorff, England

AB: *“Yes, but see, they had a completely different frame of mind. Because they knew it was first of all, definitely temporary, so there was no attempt to make any moves to (live permanently)... their mode of living or whatever. Let’s just wait till the papers come and we can go to America, and start again. You don’t start when you’re just a visitor, you know. So it was a very tenuous situation because you know, you had to, it’s like enforced vacation. You had to make the best you can. But as I.. first of all I was much younger, and secondly, I just felt I had to make a life for myself. I figured the hotel business was a good temporary stop gap thing, and let’s try to look for something more challenging, and so on.”*

IN: *“So they never considered to try to stay on in England?”*

# Alfred Batzdorff, England

“AB: “No, there was no opportunity to do so. No, I think that they (my family) were all sold on coming to America, there was no other family in England. In America, ... my mother’s brother was here (in the USA) in the meantime, and my father’s sister and her husband (who had gone to Prague) eventually arrived here (in the USA). So, I mean, this is where the family was going to reunite, as much as was left of it...”

# Case Study 4 – The Kagans

# Joseph and Margaret Kagan, Northern England

- Joseph and Margaret Kagan had met and married while in Kaunas ghetto (Lithuania), and survived the Holocaust by spending many months in hiding in that attic of a foundry
- After the war, they lived briefly in Romania while waiting for visas to join Joseph's family in Yorkshire. His father owned a textile mill in Elland, Yorkshire, but Joseph and he decided they couldn't work together
- Joseph decided to start his own mill by buying up his father's "seconds". Margaret explains...



# Joseph and Margaret Kagan, Northern England

*“What he did, this first business venture, was to buy up seconds that his father’s factory produced – second quality woollen coating – and (...) he ended up selling those pieces for more than they sold the first, you know because it was a novelty, it was a different new cloth. (...) So that was the way our first money was made, on selling cloth.”*

(Margaret explains that they then founded a new company called Kagan Textiles in Elland, Yorkshire)

# Joseph and Margaret Kagan, Northern England

*“Joseph was experimenting with his new cloths, he always said then and I think it’s still true ‘Why should one be either wet or warm when you can be both?’”*

(In 1948, Joseph patented a new cloth, called Gannex, but companies refused to purchase it because it was stiff and difficult to manufacture).

*“And Joseph said ‘OK, we’ll have to make coats to prove that it’s a good cloth’ (...) We eventually found somebody who could cut coats and we started producing coats...”*

# Joseph and Margaret Kagan, Northern England

(Still, no one bought the Gannex coat, so Joseph realized that if he could get someone famous to wear his coat, then expensive retailers like Harrods might sell his product)

“So then Joseph gets in touch with the palace and gets to know James Macdonald who was a very nice, who was, works with, what was he the Duke of Edinburgh, and he sort of says, ‘We’ve got this very nice coat which, I wonder whether the Duke, who does a lot of outdoor shooting and so on, would like to test it, it would be very good for him’. So he said ‘Well OK but where can he get it?’ (Joseph lied and) said, ‘Well you go try and get it from Harrods,’ to this chap. ‘It’s called Gannex.’”

*Margaret Kagan, Holocaust Centre North*

# Joseph and Margaret Kagan, Northern England



PM Harold Wilson, from Huddersfield, wearing a Gannex coat, *Shutterstock*; Wilson and the Kagans enjoyed a close friendship

- Both the Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and eventually PM Harold Wilson, wore the new Gannex coat, which gave the Kagans the reputation to sell the coat to major retailers
- The Kagans employed over 1,000 people and Gannex became the largest employer in the area for many years; they became millionaires and Joseph was made a life peer
- However, Joseph was also found guilty of fraud and jailed for 10 months in 1980
- Joseph returned to the House of Lords and campaigned for prison reform. He died in 1994.
- Margaret passed in 2011. They had 3 children.