

# BASQUE AND JEWISH REFUGEES AT TYTHROP HOUSE, KINGSEY, 1937 TO 1940

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*From 1937 to 1940 Tythrop House, Kingsey, became home to Basque children escaping the Spanish Civil War, followed by Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi persecution in Europe. Occupation by the Jewish refugees ended in 1940 when the premises were requisitioned by the War Office. During the period of occupation the house and estate were owned by Magdalen College, Oxford University. This paper looks at how the refugees came to Tythrop, the problems they encountered, and Magdalen's interaction with the organisations responsible for them.*

## BACKGROUND

The small village of Kingsey lies on the borders of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, some 2½ miles from Thame and 5 miles from Princes Risborough. The village was in Oxfordshire from 1894 to 1933 (Fig. 1).

Tythrop House is a large 17<sup>th</sup>-century house of two storeys and nine bays, built before 1676 by

James Herbert. It was apparently a re-modelling of a house built in 1619 by Sir Henry Spiller, but the core of the house is even older. Originally in the ownership of the Dormer family, in about 1620 the property passed by marriage to Sir Robert Spiller. In 1646, his daughter married Sir James Herbert, sixth son of the Earl of Pembroke. In 1800 the estate went by inheritance to William Richard Wykeham of Swalcliffe, and remained in his family



FIGURE 1 Map of Kingsey. Ordnance Survey 25" scale, 1898

until, in 1929, Magdalen College, Oxford, purchased it.<sup>1</sup> The estate sold for £75,000 and included the house and grounds, 2,827 acres, four cottages, Home Farm and Park and the standing timber. The house and grounds were let to the vendor, Mr Aubrey Augustus Henley Wykeham, from 25 March 1929 for 21 years at £360 p.a. but the lease was terminated by him on 25 March 1936. The Home Farm and Park were let to Wykeham from 29 September 1929 for three years at £300 p.a. The house remained unlet until the arrival of the Basque children in 1937, followed by Jewish refugees in 1938. In 1940 the premises were requisitioned by the War Office and, after their departure, Magdalen sold the house and 160 acres in 1948 to Mr H.H. Hughes for £8,600.<sup>2</sup> A few months later Hughes sold it to Mr W.H. Deeley of Ambrosden, Bicester and Mr Pennington of North Aston, Oxon. In April 1948 the owners obtained permission from Aylesbury Rural District Council (ARDC) to convert the house into eight flats but changed their minds and instead, in August 1949, they applied to Bucks County Council to demolish it and half of the stable block. They planned to convert the remaining buildings into a dwelling, and to create a pleasure garden. Apart from other historically and architecturally important aspects of the house, it contained a very fine Grinling Gibbons staircase. With the intervention of the

Bucks Archaeological Society, represented by Vice-President A.K. Wickham, and Christopher Hohler, who had generously offered to defray the legal expenses, The Society for the Protection for Ancient Buildings and other bodies, the house was saved on 11 December 1950 and a preservation order was placed on it.<sup>3</sup>

It passed through a number of owners, including Sir Arundell Neave, until in 1963 it was purchased by Mr Jeremy Cotton. He set about building up the acreage of the estate to something closer to its original size, and in 1965 employed John Hannay to restore the house. Hannay based his restoration on the Winstanley print, reversing an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century remodelling and later 19<sup>th</sup>-century additions. Cotton sold the property in 1994, and the house has remained in private ownership since then. During Cotton's ownership the stucco on the house was removed, revealing the red bricks (Figs 2, 3).

#### HOW THE BASQUE REFUGEES CAME TO TYTHROP

In April 1931, after the fall of the Spanish monarchy, an alliance of left-wing parties, having established a 'Popular Front' government, proclaimed a Republic. Jubilation soon gave way to unrest as the government was well-meaning but



FIGURE 2 Engraving of Tythrop House, by Henry Winstanley, 1680. From: Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, *Historic Views of Buckinghamshire* (Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society 2004)

weak, and promised reforms were slow to materialise. In July 1936 a military coup was countered by an uprising of pro-Republican resistance erupting into a civil war, a major conflict that devastated Spain from 17 July 1936 to 1 April 1939, and ended with the founding of an authoritarian state led by General Francisco Franco.

The Basques had always been staunchly loyal to the Republic: regional autonomy had been granted to them in 1936. Geographically the Basque region formed part of the Republican controlled area along the Cantabrian coast. The Nationalists hoped to shorten the war by attacking and capturing Madrid, but when they failed to do so they headed north into the Republican enclave. On 31 March 1937 a detachment of the Condor Legion, German squadrons serving with the Nationalists, bombed the small town of Durango and on 26 April 1937, Guernica, a small market town of 7,000 population. This was the first ever saturation bombing of a civilian population and caused international outrage. As the Basque forces fell back on Bilbao, fears mounted for the safety of the population of

the town, especially the children. In response to appeals from the Basque Government to foreign nations to give temporary asylum to their children, offers were received from France, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, USSR and Mexico. Initially the British Government adhered to the policy of the Non-Intervention Pact, which prohibited all military support and the sale and shipment of armaments to either side.

The National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) had been formed in England in late 1936 to coordinate all the voluntary relief to Spain being undertaken by a plethora of political and non-political organisations. The Committee, set up by Liberal MP Wilfred Roberts, and chaired by Conservative MP the Duchess of Atholl, included Leah Manning, a past President of the National Union of Teachers, social reformer and Labour MP. Manning had visited Spain in 1934 and was bitterly critical of the repression which she witnessed. In April 1937 she was asked by the Basque delegation in London to go to Bilbao. Two days later Guernica was bombed: she visited the town and gave a



FIGURE 3 Tythrop House 2013. Photograph by Diana Gulland

graphic account of the devastation. The Home Office finally gave in to public pressure and on 30 April approved a limited evacuation of children from the region. The British Government's final approval was subject to stringent conditions: no public funds of any sort would be made available, and the responsibility for the children's maintenance, welfare and eventual repatriation would be borne entirely by the NJCSR. The Home Office had ruled that 10 shillings per child per week had to be guaranteed by the NJCSR. The children were to be between the ages of 5 to 15 years and from families of all political affiliations and religions. The Basque Government stipulated that the children were to be kept together so as to retain their national identity.

Nationally the country was divided about the wisdom of taking in the refugees. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin was not enthusiastic, claiming, amongst other disadvantages, that 'the climate will not suit them'. Sir Alfred Knox, MP for South Bucks, believed that the children should never have been offered a safe haven here and should be returned as soon as possible. However, when the NJCSR appealed nationally for financial support, majoring on the destruction of Guernica, the fear of further attacks, and the pressing need to remove to safety as many children as possible, £12,000 was received in donations with a promise of an extra £5,000 from the Trades Union Congress (TUC).<sup>4</sup> On 15 May the NJCSR established a separate Basque Children's Committee (BCC) to administer its responsibilities. Committee members of the NJCSR travelled all over England, Wales and Scotland to establish local branches of the BCC.

During May 1937 some 20,000 children were evacuated away from the civil war. Initially 2,000 were to come to Britain but this number was eventually doubled, prompted by public pressure including Manning's graphic account of the bombing of Guernica. On the 21 May 1937 the liner SS *Habana*, with a passenger capacity of 800, left Spain bound for England with 3,826 children, 96 teachers, 118 volunteers and 15 priests, arriving in Southampton on 22 May. Initially the children were taken to North Stoneham Camp, Eastleigh, just outside Southampton, where 400 bell tents had been erected in a field. As quickly as possible the children were despatched to homes, to be known as colonies, throughout England, Wales and Scotland, all financed and staffed by volunteers. Initial

figures were given of 90 colonies but is now thought that were nearer 100.<sup>5</sup> The Salvation Army took 400 children, the Catholic church 1,200 and many other organisations became involved. There were great variations in locations from redundant workhouses or rectories, old hospitals or, as with Tythrop, large country mansions, down to huts and tents. The BCC was pressed by Eastleigh District Council to close North Stoneham Camp as soon as possible, and by mid-September all the children had been relocated. Not all colonies, though, were successfully run, not all children were made welcome, nor did all behave like angels. The children were naturally disturbed and traumatised by the violent scenes which they had witnessed at home: many had lost parents. Some of the boys were over the evacuation age of 15, as their parents had lied about their age in order to get them out of danger, and many of them, already politicised, did not want to be here. Moving between colonies, sometimes getting separated from their siblings, all added to their distress. Many colonies incurred expenses for dilapidation of property. This must have contributed to the press reports of bad behaviour, which certainly in the case of Tythrop House led to the colony being closed.

In addition to Tythrop one other colony was set up in Buckinghamshire. Located at the redundant Smallpox Isolation Hospital at Booker, High Wycombe, it became home to 31 boys and girls, arriving on 16 July 1937, with further transferrals in the following months.<sup>6</sup> Ten transferred from the Scarborough colony as late as September 1938. 'After the outbreak of the Second World War ... The Basque children vacated the Booker colony and were replaced by troops training in bomb disposal'.<sup>7</sup> Four colonies were established in Oxfordshire: the closest to Buckinghamshire was Thame, where they occupied Rycotewood, the old Thame Poor Law Institute. Fifty children, all girls, arrived at Thame on 17 June 1937<sup>8</sup> and left on 28 December 1937, when the colony closed.<sup>9</sup> Probably the children went to Booker and Thame directly from North Stoneham, but the arrival at Tythrop was, as will be seen, much more complicated.

In Buckinghamshire the *Thame Gazette* carried a general appeal for financial support, estimating that funds must be found to clothe, feed and educate the children, and that there was a need for more local committees.<sup>10</sup> Princes Risborough parish council were considering a local fund for the

children<sup>11</sup> and Stoke Mandeville held a Sunday evening concert in support of the work of the Bucks Basque Relief Committee.<sup>12</sup> Support for the Tythrop colony will be covered later but Booker received help from the local community. Eighty children from the Booker camp were guests of the Aylesbury Congregational church: after entertainment and tea the children sang national songs.<sup>13</sup> A stall to collect children's clothes, household utensils, farm and garden produce was set up in Market Square, Aylesbury on Wednesdays and Saturdays for the children at Booker.<sup>14</sup> A party from Booker went to Brill to play football and stoolball with the local children.<sup>15</sup>

The Co-operative Society gave staunch support to Spain throughout the civil war. Their national policy was to condemn the brutality and barbarism of modern warfare, as conducted by dictatorship tyranny.<sup>16</sup> Their 'Milk for Spain' campaign had raised over £22,000 by November 1938, and was used for the provision of dried milk supplies and food. Despite the bombing, every shipload for Spain reached its destination safely.<sup>17</sup> The Oxford Co-operative Society (OCS) took an active part in welcoming the Basque children, holding concerts and other fund raising activities on their behalf. The educational committee arranged a display of films dealing with graphic pictures of the war in the Cowley Road Co-operative Assembly Rooms in Oxford, at which Poppy Vulliamy, an activist, gave an account of her personal experiences in Spain. She played an important role in caring for 50 of the older Basque children, and later arranged for them to be transferred to Tythrop House.<sup>18</sup> The OCS were later to extend their welcome to the Jewish refugees when they arrived in England and, as will be seen, played a leading role at Tythrop.

### THE TYTHROP COLONY

Before Aubrey Wykeham terminated the lease in 1936, Magdalen College had made some attempts to sell the property, but without success. The Estates Bursar, Arnold J. Forster, was therefore pleased to receive a letter from Herbert Dulake & Co., Land and Estate Agents, enclosing a request from William F. Stirling of the NJCSR in which he offered £300 for a short lease on the house and 45 acres. Magdalen agreed to the request, but were unable to let the 45 acres as they were already let to Mr Aubrey Honour of Manor (Home) Farm, and

the coverts were let to the shooting tenant.<sup>19</sup> The BCC initially hesitated about taking Tythrop as Sylvia Dobson, the Organising Secretary of the colony, was concerned about the cost of installing electricity: she suggested a quarter's free rental in compensation. In an attempt to convince Magdalen that they would be responsible tenants, she informed them that she had previously run a house for Basque children at Colchester, and found that they really cared for it, polishing, dusting and cleaning, and that the boys were good at gardening.<sup>20</sup> The College agreed to the free rental request on the understanding that the BCC paid for the connection of the house to the electric mains and such re-wiring as necessary.<sup>21</sup>

The BCC, in a letter to its members in September 1937, contained a report on the colonies from Leah Manning, in which Tythrop is mentioned. The Baydon Hole, Newbury, colony was closing down, and if Reading was unable to house the children she suggested Tythrop Hall (*sic*) 'It is an excellent place, and we have a competent staff willing to run it'. The BCC estimated that Tythrop could accommodate 140 children, and that the running costs would be £105/3/1 per week. This was to include rent, rates, running expenses, equipment, staff and 10/- per child.<sup>22</sup> [In the event the Baydon Hole children transferred to Bray Court, Maidenhead]. Also in September the Finance Committee of ARDC received a letter from the BCC saying that they proposed renting Tythrop House: they asked if the Council would view the rating of the house sympathetically. ARDC felt that it was not appropriate to ask local people to forego their public rates, and the request was turned down, not just for Tythrop but 'for any home provided in the District for Basque children refugees'.<sup>23</sup>

By October 1937 Magdalen College had received bankers' references for the three tenants for the temporary letting, all of them prominent officials from the BCC. Wilfred Roberts was a Liberal MP and Secretary of the BCC; H. [Vincent] Tewson was an official of the TUC, active in the Aid Spain Movement and on the BCC main committee; Betty Arne was the Organising Secretary of the BCC.<sup>24</sup> The children started to arrive in early October 1937. Prior to their arrival, furniture had been moved into the house and workmen had started to prepare for occupation, in spite of the fact that the contract had not been signed for the letting. When this was drawn to Dobson's attention she

temporarily withdrew the workmen and apologised to Magdalen.<sup>25</sup> When Miss Montagnan, a Ministry of Health Inspector, visited on 5 November 1937 there were 72 children, of which 56 were boys aged between 6 and 14 and 16 were girls aged 5 to 15. There was no local managing committee, the BCC being directly responsible. A local medical practitioner had been appointed as Medical Officer. Miss Wilcox, the matron, recently retired from Bournemouth Municipal Hospital, was working in a voluntary capacity but was in receipt of a small honorarium. There were three male teachers all speaking both English and Spanish, two Spanish women teachers, a Spanish doctor, a male cook and a male assistant and engineer. The house was described as 'centrally heated', but that actually meant that each room had a fireplace. The medical officer had approved the number of beds in the dormitories, and although the bedding was described as 'satisfactory' there were no reserves of blankets for use in colder weather, and some beds had no mattresses. The children's clothing was poor; in particular shoes seemed to be in short

supply. Electricity was being installed, but in the meantime lighting was provided by oil lamps and candles and water was pumped by hand as Tythrop was not connected to the mains water supply at that stage. More girls were apparently expected, but the Inspector expressed concern about the inadequacy of the sanitary arrangements and stated that it was undesirable to take in more children until things had improved. It was suggested that Dr J.T.C. Sims-Roberts, M.O.H. ARDC should be approached with a view to providing extra facilities. Both he and the sanitary inspector visited in November 1937, and the latter agreed to supervise the erection of some outside latrines. The home was run on boarding school lines; the children had regular lessons, the older boys being divided into two classes and the younger ones joining with the girls to form a class. Football was the most popular form of recreation. The children were given pocket money ranging from 2d to 6d, which they could spend in the shop on the premises<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 4).

Children continued to arrive during and after November 1937. The BCC's Minutes of the Execu-



FIGURE 4 Basque children and staff outside Tythrop House, 1937 or 1938. Source unknown. Reproduced with the permission of the Basque Children of '37 Association

tive Committee on 2 November 1937 recorded that the Great Yarmouth colony was closing down and the children were to be transferred to Tythrop.<sup>27</sup> Two of the boys, who transferred, recalled their experiences of the event:

Fausto Benito Gomez's testimony:

"Soon they took us to another colony on the outskirts of Great Yarmouth on the east coast...The rest of our stay in England, until we went back to Spain, was at Tythrop House. The colony was also a large house on two floors with very wide staircases going up to the first floor. When we arrived it was already occupied by another group of boys and girls. Up to that point we had always been a group of 50 boys. [These would have been the boys that Poppy Vulliamy had taken under her wing]. The colony was better organised than our previous ones had been. I believe there were lessons, but I don't remember going to them regularly.<sup>28</sup>"

Luis Lavilla San Vicente's testimony:

"...it was summer and the weather was fine, but when it started to change they moved us to Rollesby, near Great Yarmouth. The following change was to Tythrop House, where there was a larger group than ours already. There were girls too, and we hadn't had any with us until then. We didn't stay there very long and again we moved, this time to Faringdon.<sup>29</sup>"

During their time at Tythrop the children benefited from local support in the form of entertainment and fund raising activities. Eighty boys and girls were taken to a pantomime in Oxford. 'Through the kindness of Mrs Seaward, Lady Kealy and Mr Dorrill, of the New Theatre [Oxford], these children were transported from Tythrop House to the wonders of Dick Whittington'.<sup>30</sup> Members of Haddenham TOC H paid a visit to Tythrop House to entertain the children with a musical evening.<sup>31</sup> The Aylesbury Town Clerk submitted a letter to the Markets, Cemetery and Baths Committee in February 1938, which he had received from the BCC, requesting the use of the Town Hall for a concert and display of traditional dances by the Basque children from Tythrop House, and other colonies in the neighbourhood, asking for the lowest possible terms. They were offered the venue

free but subject to payment for the erection of the stage.<sup>32</sup> A Basque boys football team from Tythrop defeated a team at Messrs Cadbury's Bourneville by four goals to two. The boys afterwards attended a social in Birmingham where they sang Spanish songs. The transport was provided by the General Manager of the OCS.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately the behaviour of some of the children gave cause for concern. They had only been in occupation a week when Magdalen received complaints about boys interfering with the pheasants and the Tythrop shoots. Dobson explained that the problem had been caused by several new boys who had arrived on the previous Saturday; there had not been time to inform them that the disturbance of game was not allowed. She feared that the boys were not as rigorously controlled as they should have been by the current male helper, but he was to be replaced and hopefully the new man would demand discipline from them. Dulake pointed out to Dobson that the events had constituted a breach of covenants, and that Magdalen would feel bound to take process if trouble persisted. The offence was thought to be serious enough for an apology to be sent by Arne on behalf of the BCC.<sup>34</sup>

The College Clerk of Works, Mr Morris, had visited Tythrop on the 3 November in connection with the electric light, and had found a whole catalogue of damage by the boys. Amongst other complaints the boys had been running all over the roof and shifting slates (the Ministry of Health Inspector had noted that several boys had climbed out onto the parapet which ran round the whole of the top of the house to use it as a grandstand from which to watch football matches between the Basque children and a local team); glass had been smashed in various places, and it looked as if food had been thrown onto the dining room walls. To add insult to injury, Morris's car had been broken into and his lunch stolen. At this point Magdalen College gave formal notice that unless there was an improvement in discipline and behaviour the agreement with the BCC would have to be terminated forthwith. Dobson initially refuted the claims, but finally agreed that the Clerk of Works report had been substantially correct.<sup>35</sup>

During December Morris paid very frequent visits to insure that all damage was noted at once, and prevented as far as possible.<sup>36</sup> However, there were some inevitable misunderstandings. Aubrey

Honour of Manor Farm had complained that visitors to the house were not shutting the gate leading to the garden; his cows were getting in and running the risk of being poisoned by eating evergreens. However, on investigation the gate was found to be completely broken and therefore could not be shut.<sup>37</sup> Miss Elsie Timbey, who had taken over from Dobson after she had resigned, asked Magdalen if a football pitch could be laid beyond the railings to the east of the house, as the present pitch was being played on so much that it would be good to give it a rest. It is not difficult to imagine the state of the 'pitch', as we have already heard that football was the most popular recreation. However, as the lease was for the grounds of the house only the College could not give them permission to play outside it, and so the damage would have continued.<sup>38</sup> In another incident four small boys had been collecting old wood for fires in the house, but were found by a 'warden' felling a young tree. The 'warden' apparently forcibly took the chopper from the boys and hit one with a stick. Timbey apologised, but was shocked by the way the boys had been treated as 'they were gathering wood with the object of saving us money'.<sup>39</sup>

Magdalen was attempting to sell the house in spite of the fact that 'The presence of the Basque children is making it even more difficult than before to dispose permanently of the house'. Oxford and Cambridge University Club expressed an interest, but took it no further. Sir Donald Fergusson, senior official in the Permanent Civil Service and an old member of Magdalen College, was interested in purchasing or leasing the house. However, when his wife visited in late December 1937, she found the house 'was in an indescribable state and a large sum would need to be spent on redecoration...the place is beyond anything that I can afford'.<sup>40</sup>

Magdalen's Estates Bursar, with Morris, visited on 5 January 1938 to meet Timbey and to inspect the property. The report gives a graphic account of the highly insanitary state of affairs, and the damage to the house. The Bursar felt that it was impossible 'with the best will in the world' for the Administrator and her staff to protect the property adequately. He consequently gave a month's notice to the BCC to vacate the property, requesting that they should pay the proportionate rent up to the date of quitting and make a monetary payment for damages. The BCC suggested evacuation on 28

February 1938; Magdalen agreed, but with conditions. Adequate steps were to be taken by the staff to prevent further damage being done to the property, particularly to the roof, windows, trees and shrubs. Vacant possession was to be given without fail, with no extension beyond 28 February 1938, and payment was to be made as directed.<sup>41</sup> At a joint meeting of the BCC and NJCSR, to discuss repatriation and falling funds:

"Miss Arne reported that Tythrop was closing with outstanding accounts to £260 and the premises were being left in dilapidation. A new committee was being formed at Oxford to maintain the children. Dr Russell said they had three houses in view and they hoped to have something ready by the end of the month. They would be able to support the children for a minimum of three months.<sup>42</sup>"

The children left on 28 February 1938<sup>43</sup>, and the College surveyors proceeded to deal with the BCC's surveyors, Messrs Burrows & Bradfield, 'Having regard to all circumstances in connection with this unfortunate letting, it appears to me important that the negotiations should be carried out strictly through the right channel'.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, what happened at Tythrop was being mirrored in some of the other colonies, and the *Oxford Times* was quick to publicise the reason for vacating the property. Under the heading "Young Wreckers" the article compared the exemplary behaviour of the children at the Aston Colony, near Witney, with those at Tythrop House. A representative of the *Oxford Times* had visited after the children had left, and inspected the wanton damage done by them. It was stated that the blame for the damage must fall largely upon those responsible for sending the children there. Conversely, one of the letters the following week was from J. Dudley Pank, Boy Scout Commissioner, claiming that the damage was much exaggerated and that the house was in a poor state before the Basques took over. Mr Pank invited the anonymous visitor to inspect Buscot Park, Lord Faringdon's estate, where a number of the elder boys had gone, to see how well behaved they were.<sup>45</sup>

The dilapidations amounted to £847/7/11, but the BCC argued against paying the full amount for various reasons. They claimed that the house was in a very dirty condition when they had taken it over,



it had to be cleaned at great expense and also was in a poor state of repair. They were sure that Magdalen College had been aware of the purpose for which the house was to be used, and the type of children to be occupying it. It was on account of the old and dilapidated condition of the house that it was taken for that particular purpose. Decorations therefore could not be expected at the end of the period of use, but the agreement ought rather to cover such items as glass breakages etc. They stated that as Magdalen had delayed consenting to and carrying out the electrical installation, lamps had been used, accounting for the soot marks. They therefore suggested £350 in full settlement of all claims. Magdalen did not agree with the accusations, claiming that the entire redecoration of the house was not necessary when vacated by the previous tenant, as the majority of the rooms had been left in a very fair state of decorative repair. The Bursar reminded the BCC that he had been reluctant to allow the house to be occupied by the Basque children: Magdalen had only consented to the letting after Dobson had given the most positive assurance that the house would be well cared for and the children under strict control. He also reminded the BCC that they were responsible for installing the electricity. Magdalen rejected the offer of £350 but proposed that the original sum be reduced to £542/2/4, consisting of £500 for dilapidations; rent £35/12/4; surveyors' fees for checking schedule £6/10/0. They offered to reduce the amount because the College was mindful that the use and occupation to which the premises were put was that of a charitable organization. The BCC agreed, and payment was settled on 7 May 1938.<sup>46</sup> In order to carry out the payment the BCC had to request a transfer of £500 from the NJCSR at its meeting on 3 May.<sup>47</sup>

#### WHERE THE CHILDREN WENT AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE COLONIES

In general, many of the children moved several times as leases ran out, or colonies ceased to be viable as repatriation began in the autumn of 1937, following Franco's demand that all evacuees and exiles should be returned to Spain. The BCC had the challenging task of re-locating children and finding suitable accommodation, mindful all the time of the financial implications. As they received no state funding lack of money was a permanent

challenge, particularly after repatriation, when the plight of the children dropped from the political arena and the public gaze. Some of the larger colonies with accommodation for over 100, e.g. Bray Court, Maidenhead, became the destination for many of the children transferred from some of the smaller homes. At this stage most of the children would have been either orphans or those whose parents could not be traced.<sup>48</sup> It is quite likely that Tythrop, if it had not closed so early, would have had a similar role to Bray Court, as it could accommodate 140 children. A number of the children at Tythrop had been repatriated before it closed, as a BCC circular sent out in October 1938, requesting news of children who had been sent back to Spain, contained an entry on the colony. Poppy Vulliamy listed those children repatriated from Tythrop and Faringdon, with details of what had happened to them on return to Spain. Of the 19 or so names listed some had not written back, some had found work but others had returned home to find both parents had been killed.<sup>49</sup> There is no evidence of the number of children left at Tythrop when it closed, but Vulliamy approached Gavin Henderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Faringdon, to suggest that he might find room at his home in Buscot Park for a group of Basque boys in her care. 'After a cold winter, first at Great Yarmouth, later at Tythrop Park near Thame, they were homeless'. Lord Faringdon had been out to Aragon to serve in a field hospital at the beginning of the civil war: on his return he did much to publicise the struggle. He was, therefore, sympathetic to Vulliamy's request and offered her two empty lodges on the edge of his estate, on the understanding that she arranged for two temporary wooden buildings to be built as extra dormitories. The boys arrived in March 1938, straight from Tythrop. From Faringdon they were later transferred to the Shipton-under-Wychwood colony.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the repatriations, nationally over 1,000 of the children were still in Britain at the end of the Civil War in 1939; 400 remained here at the end of WWII, many of them settling permanently. Some of the colonies became home to Jewish refugees under the *Kindertransport* scheme. Diana Hubbock, Secretary of the Committee for Jewish Child Refugees, whose aim it was to place the children in private homes, had approached the BCC to ascertain if the children could be placed in Basque homes as a temporary measure where there were

vacancies.<sup>51</sup> Tythrop also became home to Jewish refugees, following the departure of the Basques, but these were not part of the *Kindertransport* scheme. As will be seen, these were older children and young adults who came as part of an agricultural training scheme.

#### JEWISH REFUGEES AND THE TYTHROP SCHEME

Immediately after Hitler seized power in Germany, in 1933, the first exodus of refugees began. Initially they went to Western Europe, favouring France, Czechoslovakia and Holland, but it was America which was the greatest refuge for emigrants. However, visas were limited to those who could present an affidavit from an American citizen able to put down a considerable amount of money. Only a trickle of between 2,000 and 3,000 had reached Britain by April 1934. The British government had also introduced a visa system, in order to achieve a better control of the influx of refugees, but lifted restrictions for certain categories, which included transmigrants, domestics and those whose maintenance in Britain was financially guaranteed. However, after the Nazi violence against the Jewish population, known as *Kristallnacht*, on 9 to 10 November 1938, numbers seeking emigration drastically increased. It became clear that the Nazi policy against Jews was one of extermination or elimination. In Britain, public opinion was deeply roused by the brutality of the persecution: as a result there was a popular willingness to enlarge asylum. The government modified its administrative procedures to allow refugees to enter when they were guaranteed either by organisations or by private individuals, who took responsibility for them. A broadcasted national appeal for funds to assist all refugees from Germany and Austria without distinction of creed raised over £500,000, and the appeal by the Council for German Jewry (CGJ) raised nearly £750,000.

As with the Basques, a serious concern was for the safety and survival of children. A large group of children under 17 arrived in Britain from Germany under the auspices of the Movement for the Care of Children, known as the Children's Transport (*Kindertransport*). Some of the children went to private homes but some, as described above, found themselves in Basque colonies, creating a link between the two groups of refugees. However, it

was an older group of refugees who came to Tythrop House, under an agricultural training scheme. The CGJ set up a special Agricultural Committee with a grant of £18,000 to deal with the growing number of young men and women brought in for training for agricultural and industrial occupations. The Committee was responsible for placing young persons with farms and in training hostels in order to prepare them for emigration, principally to Palestine, but also to United States and Australia. The *Reichvertretung der Juden in Deutschland* [National Representative Agency of German Jews] in Germany and the *Kultus-Gemeinde* of Vienna were responsible for the selection of pupils and for preparing them for departure to England. Negotiations with the Home Office were carried out with great speed: by early 1939, 16 training centres had been set up in England. 1,500 permits were granted, but only 1,350 holders succeeded in leaving Germany and Austria before the outbreak of hostilities. Some of the training centres were in large houses and others in colleges. In addition to Tythrop House, other locations included Tingrith House in Bedfordshire, Wandsworth Agricultural College and Wallingford Farm Training College.<sup>52</sup> All the training centres were under the wing of the Agricultural Committee with one exception, the one which was destined to come to Tythrop. Although the CGJ was approached for financial support, and initially willingly gave it, the Tythrop House scheme was independent. As will be shown, this was not a wise decision, and later gave rise to complications for Magdalen College, the CGJ, the organisers of Tythrop and the refugees themselves.

#### THE LANGHAM COMMITTEE AND TYTHROP HOUSE

In December 1938 and January 1939 reports appeared in the national and local press:

“First German Jewish refugee agricultural institution in England to be run on a self-supporting and co-operative basis. 100 young people, aged from 16 to 21, who have been studying under Director Professor L. Moch on a farm outside Berlin will take over Tythrop House and the surrounding farmland of 200 acres. Fifteen hundred acres of farmland have been allocated to Professor Moch and Dr Leonore Goldschmidt

in North Carolina [for the refugees to emigrate to after training].<sup>53</sup>

“Training for refugees. Tythrop House Scheme. The main outlines of a practical scheme for training refugees in agriculture were announced at a party given last week by Miss Pamela Frankau, the novelist.”<sup>54</sup>

“An interesting announcement concerning Tythrop House appeared in the newspapers on Sunday. A small Committee [Langham] has been formed under the chairmanship of Mr Henry Solomon, consisting of technicians, architects, estate agents, practising farmers, and agricultural experts, and among the patrons are the Dean of Westminster, Lord Corvedale, Mr George Strauss, MP and Col Waley Cohen. Tythrop House, in Oxfordshire, has been leased from Magdalen College. The house will take 200 students, who will be trained in modern intensive methods and equipped for an agricultural career. When fully trained and efficient the students will be helped to emigrate to America or to the British Dominions and Colonies, either as competent farmers or as teachers in agriculture. As each student leaves, his place will be filled by another.”<sup>55</sup>

Dr Leonore Goldschmidt, referred to in the press cutting above, had established a private school in Berlin in 1934, serving as a stepping stone for Jewish children and adults through evening classes, preparing for emigration to Britain and the USA. She made desperate attempts to save the school, applying in April 1939 to the CGJ for financial help to bring it and the pupils to England, and had considered Tythrop House. The CGJ were unable to offer a grant: consequently the school was closed down by the authorities, and Leonore and her family escaped to England.<sup>57</sup>

The Langham Committee produced an appeal leaflet detailing their objectives. These were as outlined in the press coverage, with the added information that the students would work under the guidance of Professor Alexander Moch and Professor C.S. Orwin [School of Rural Economy, Oxford]. The organisation was to be called ‘Tythrop House Agricultural Training Institute’: the Committee felt that the success that had attended Dartington Hall and other similar establishments

gave them the confidence to expect the same. They saw Tythrop as the first of other estates which they hoped to take over and turn into agricultural institutes for refugees. They expected the first batch of students, who they anticipated would be aged between 14 and 20, towards the end of January 1939. To equip and maintain the Institute and its students and to finance their emigration, £20,000 was needed, of which £3,500 had been allocated to the Committee by the CGJ in conjunction with the Baldwin Fund. Further contributions of £5,000 had been received.<sup>58</sup> The CGJ had approved the grant of £3,500 on the understanding that the young people should be selected by the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland*, in line with the other agricultural institutes. £2,000 was initially to cover expenses in the first year, to be followed by £1,500 during the second year.<sup>59</sup>

#### NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE LANGHAM COMMITTEE AND MAGDALEN COLLEGE

The Langham Committee began negotiations with Magdalen College in December 1938 for the lease of Tythrop House and a neighbouring farm. Magdalen College’s Estates Bursar, in correspondence with Messrs Jackson Stops and Staff, Estate Agents, recommended that a lease for the house be granted to the Langham Committee for 7 years at £145 p.a. and for the Home (Manor) Farm at £255 p.a. The lessees were to be responsible for all costs of maintenance and repair; no structural alterations were to be undertaken without the consent of the Bursar. The College would contribute not more than £1,000 towards the cost of putting the property in repair, including alterations and extensions to the drainage system and connection to the main water supply when it became available. Adequate sanitary accommodation was an important requisite. Nervous after the unfortunate lease to the Basque children, the College requested a scheme to ensure the proper discipline and control of the students before they were allowed to take up residence in the property. The College also requested that the lease should be in the names of three or more Trustees who would undertake personal liability for all the covenants contained in the lease.<sup>60</sup>

The Langham Committee were unhappy with some aspects of the lease. In particular they did not want to give personal guarantees, but were anxious to have the agreement in the name of the Friendly

Society which they were having duly registered. They suggested a monthly or quarterly survey of the property, undertaking to make good any damage found to have been done immediately, and felt that this would be sufficient safeguard. The College was adamant that any arrangement should carry with it the automatic termination of the agreement, if they failed to carry out such repairs, as 'the fact remains that in the space of two months the Basque children succeeded in doing damage of the order of £800.' They suggested an alternative would be for the Langham Committee to place £1,000 as security against damage.<sup>61</sup> As the Committee were not anxious to comply with that suggestion, they agreed to provide names of four Trustees: Angel Botibol, proprietor of the firm of A. Botibol & Co., which owned 81 tobacco shops in London; Bernard Nathaniel Waley-Cohen [1<sup>st</sup> Baronet]; Howard Samuel, Estate Agent and Henry Solomon, Solicitor, and to submit a scheme of discipline.<sup>62</sup> In further correspondence between Magdalen and the Langham Committee Trustees over who should be responsible for repairs and building works to prepare for the arrival of the refugees, it was finally agreed that Magdalen would supply the necessary chlorinating plant to purify the existing well supply until main drainage became available, and to make good such of the re-wiring of the house as was done for the Basque children the previous year. In return, the Langham Committee were to undertake all necessary repair and redecoration, including providing a protective casing for the Grinling Gibbon staircase. The lessees also agreed to pay for the sanitary and washing installations. Over the thorny question of discipline, after two draft schemes were submitted to Magdalen, it was finally agreed between the two parties that the Director of the Tythrop scheme, Professor Moch, should issue standing orders for the working of the establishment: these would be available for inspection by Magdalen from time to time.<sup>63</sup>

The Friendly Society referred to above was registered in the spring of 1939, changing the name of the scheme from The Tythrop House Agricultural Training Institute, run by the Langham Committee, to the Tythrop House Agricultural Estates Limited (THAEL). Of the original members of the Committee Henry Solomon, W. McCartney and W. George Wallis [President, Oxford Co-operative Society] served on the

replacement and were joined by Professor C.S. Orwin who was previously a patron. Additional members of the new Committee were Jeffrey Read [General Manager, OCS], Captain S.J. Upfold [Institute of Rural Economy, Oxford], H. Firshman and B. Japhet-Fontheim. The Registered Office for the new society was Foxhill Farm, Kingsey. Botibol, Samuel and Waley-Cohen were not part of the new organisation, and apparently not in favour of it, claiming that Solomon had set it up without consulting them. The rules of THAEL were those laid down for any other Friendly Society: 'The Society may provide, subscribe to, and maintain funds for charitable or other purposes for the benefit of its members...whether resident in this country or not...' Shares were issued at £1 with no member holding more than one.<sup>64</sup>

The Langham Committee's immediate concern had been to lease a farm close to Tythrop House for the refugees to work on. In a letter to Aubrey Honour, the tenant of Manor Farm, the Estates Bursar explained about the Langham Committee and that they would like to take some agricultural land... 'if they come to Tythrop it will be only as a properly organised and well managed institution. It will be nothing like the Basques'.<sup>65</sup> Initially the College offered to allow the lessees to take over the tenancy of Manor Farm at the existing rent of £255 p.a., provided they could arrange terms satisfactory to Honour. Honour claimed that the 'Refugee Committee' had offered him compensation for leaving, inviting him to continue in the Lodge rent free at an agreed salary, but as no figure had been mentioned he was inclined to keep on the farm if he was not made a good offer.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently Magdalen offered Foxhill Farm, as an alternative, at the existing rent of £198 p.a. The current tenant was Mr Wickham and the farm was approximately 143 acres, larger than Manor Farm. Mr Wickham's tenancy was due to expire and he agreed to hand the farm over on 25 March 1939<sup>67</sup> (Fig 5).

The first refugees finally arrived on 11 March.<sup>68</sup> As with the Basques, numbers fluctuated as new refugees came and others left. There were other parallels with the Basques as they also moved in before the lease had been signed, without notifying Magdalen. Unfortunately, as Magdalen was unaware of their arrival, there was no one on hand to explain the workings of the chlorinating plant to them. Morris, Magdalen's Clerk of Works, had to answer a complaint that the plant was not working



FIGURE 5 Foxhill Farmhouse, 2013. Photograph by Diana Gulland

but on inspection he found that the domestic hot water system had been emptied by workmen, employed by the Langham Committee, and not turned back on. Within two days Morris was back at Tythrop, this time to find that the only problem was a blown fuse. Magdalen was not impressed with the competence of the workmen employed!<sup>69</sup>

The refugees settled in and started work on decorating the house and working the farm. Five contemporary sources provide accounts of a productive period between May and September 1939, both for the house and the farm. The first source is an account by Joyce Weiner, a young Jewish freelance journalist, and a visiting lecturer at the University of Leipzig. She had visited Tythrop in May 1939 and wrote a report appealing for funds to support the scheme. She described the background to the Institute and met the first immigrants who had arrived about 2 months previously. They were between 16 and 24 years old, some of them from concentration camps, and had already worked on the rehabilitation of the house and grounds. C.S. Orwin, Professor of Agriculture, personally supervised the curriculum, and his assistant [Captain S.J. Upfold] lived on the prem-

ises. Both men were from the School of Rural Economy at Oxford University. There were also trained instructors from Germany.

“Hand in hand with the co-operative discipline, a beginning has been made to weld the economic structure of the settlement into a co-operative institution, whose incorporation as a regular Co-operative Society is imminent. The actual fostering of the scheme is done by the Oxford and District Co-operative Society which markets the produce and provides the food for the humans and cattle at wholesale prices. The food ...is dispensed by a Kitchen Committee... run by the students themselves with the aid of a few German women who shoulder the burden of cooking for the whole community.<sup>70</sup>”

The second source is a report to Magdalen of a visit made by Mr Dunstan Skilbeck from the School of Rural Economy, Oxford, to inspect the house and farm during May 1939. He was:

“...very much impressed by the general condition of the property. The house looked clean and

well painted, the kitchen garden had been tackled and the farm improved. There is no doubt that the refugees are an asset to the estate and materially improving it.”

He discussed with Captain Upfold and the refugees the government provisions for ploughing up grass and taking a hay crop off before starting. He was able to hand over previously derelict allotments for them to work. A new road from the house to near the church had been pegged out and work was due to start. The road was to make the walk from the house to Foxhill Farm shorter for the refugees: it was to be carried out by them under the supervision of Dr W. Klatt, one of the German instructors, for which they would receive payment from Magdalen. Skilbeck agreed with the refugees that it would be unwise to plough small parcels which would be cut off from the park by the new road, as the grass was ‘super excellent’, and suggested fencing it off into one or two small and valuable paddocks for calves.<sup>71</sup> Klatt was concerned that the start of the work had been delayed, as other urgent work had arisen:

“I hope you will understand, that the management of so much untrained and less trained people can only be done, if the arrangements are done in time and not changed. Also I am responsible to the Langham Committee that all work is productive.<sup>72</sup>”

However, the road was completed and is the secondary exit road from the house which is used to this day<sup>73</sup> (Fig. 6). At Foxhill Farm Skilbeck noted that the cow shed had come into use: Mr Haynes, tenant of Litney Farm, next to Foxhill, agreed to a right of access to the shed through his farm road if in exchange the refugees took over the cottage known as Litney Cottage. Skilbeck suggested that it would be cheaper for Magdalen to let the refugees have the cottage rent free. As mains water supply was available at the gate of Litney Farm, he advised that this should be connected to a proposed new cooling house as there was no supply at that time.<sup>74</sup>

The third source is a letter from Henry Solomon to C.G. Hudson, Rotary Club of Morpath, appealing for financial support for the Tythrop scheme:

“Tythrop is run as a Co-operative Society and we expect to receive our Charter of Incorporation within a fortnight...each member has one share and they themselves control their policy and their internal regulations. The control is entirely vested in the working members themselves, and the function of myself in London and Professor C.S. Orwin in Oxford is merely to give advice and assistance. The mansion is now fitted in every way as an up to date Agricultural Institute with baths, showers and fitments capable of housing 200 people. We have already purchased some £1500 worth of stock and we are producing very nearly 50 gallons of milk per week. We have excellent marketing arrangements. We buy everything at wholesale price from the Oxford & District Co-operative Society and they have undertaken to buy all our produce from us, also at wholesale prices... At the present moment, we have 60 students, in addition to the 40 trained agricultural workers... we are expecting a further 100 boys within the next few weeks.<sup>75</sup>”

The fourth source is *The Wheatshaeaf*, Journal of the Oxford Co-operative Society (OCS). The OCS, who had helped the Basque refugees, now turned their attention to ‘German, Austrian and Czech Jewish refugees coming to reside at Tythrop House only 1½ miles from our Thame branch’:

“Twenty-five of the homeless and unfortunate young men arrived some six months ago. Some of them straight from Hitler’s concentration camps... At the time of writing [September] there are now 117 residing there and being trained as agriculturalists and when more fully competent most of these will be transferred to British Dominions and overseas. They will then be replaced by others now living in destitution and misery in Germany... Within five months they have performed miracles. The gardens are well stocked with all kinds of English vegetables, fields of corn, well-stocked pigsties, chicken-sheds, cattle-sheds, and stables. It is no secret to say that practical help and assistance has been rendered by the society, who materially helped them in bedding and household utensils as near cost price as possible. In particular J. Read (General Manager), Mr W.G. Wallis (President), F. Andrews (butchery manager), and G.

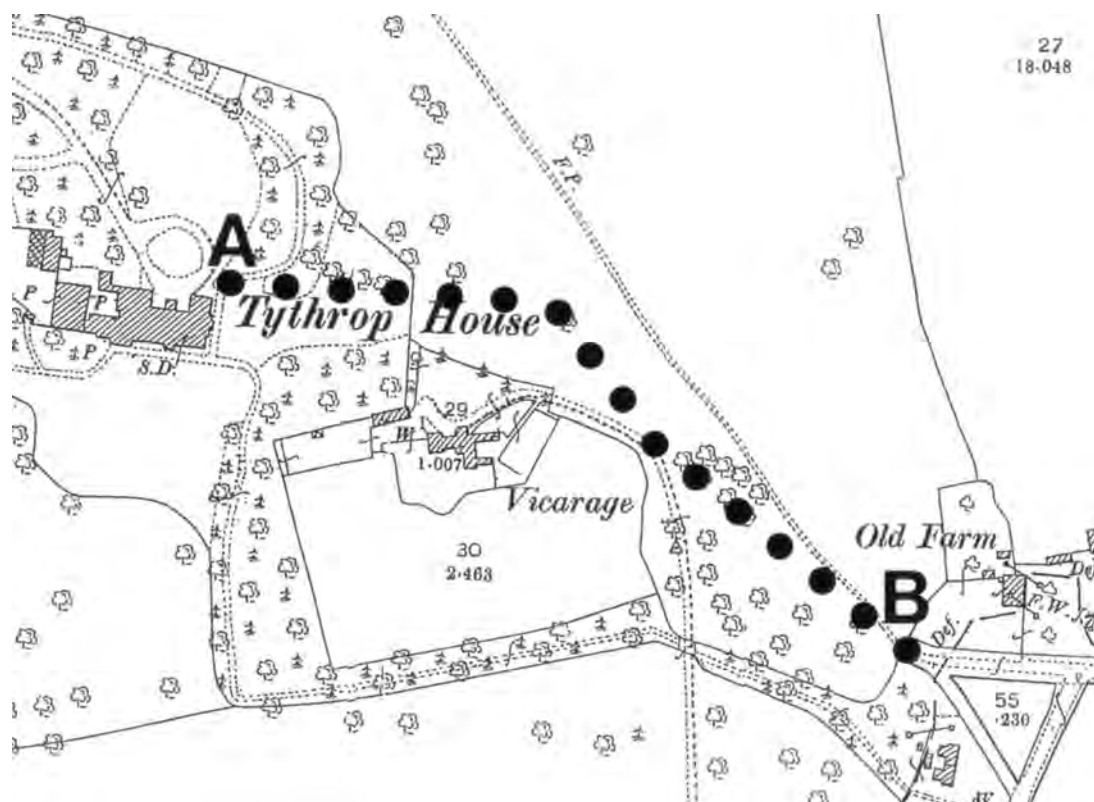


FIGURE 6 Line of new road built by the Jewish refugees in 1940. Shown by dotted line from A to B on Ordnance Survey 25" scale map, 1898

Lallemand (dairy manager) have all given valuable advice and assistance. The marketable produce of the farm is being bought and retailed by the society. There are at present 150 fattening pigs and 10 breeding sows, three horses, 80 sheep, 40 heifers, and a multitude of chickens and still more to come...<sup>76</sup>

The fifth source is a journal called '*Rundbriefe*' which contains comments made by the refugees themselves. In 1936 the *Reichvertretung Der Juden in Deutschland* had set up an *Auswandererlehrgut* (Emigration Training Center) called *Gross Breesen*, named after a small village 30km from Breslau on the German/Polish border. Established with the intention of eventually helping Jews who did not want to emigrate to Palestine, [*i.e.* non-Zionists] by creating a colony, or a state elsewhere,

of which the Gross-Breeseners, agricultural trainees, were to form the vanguard. After *Kristallnacht*, Curt Bondy, the Director, and all the trainees over the age of 18, were arrested and taken to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Bondy was released after 6 weeks and emigrated, as did many of the trainees, to various parts of the world. In 1939 Bondy instituted '*Rundbriefe*' a journal, circulated to all ex Gross-Breeseners, in which the boys were encouraged to send messages or news. Three boys came to Tythrop House and two of them sent contributions.<sup>77</sup>

From Otto Weil:

"...pleased with circular-homesick for Breesen. Lately I have been working at a neighbour's farm. [This may have been in Towersey, the next parish to Kingsey, as correspondence between

Messrs Forest Products Ltd of Gloucestershire and the Estates Bursar during April 1939 refer to an agreement with the CCGJ for the employment of some of the refugees from Tythrop on estate work for Magdalen at Towersey).<sup>78</sup> In the morning and evening, each time I have to milk 14 cows there, look after the calves and before noon from 9.30 until 1 o'clock I work with a team of horses. At present we cart manure onto the hay pastures; if the weather is all right tomorrow we will bring in our oats, which, is already cut for three weeks and meanwhile sprouts. But one can learn much all the same..."

From Heinz Jacobsohn:

"Now I am already 2 months in England and find it so lovely and splendid here and am completely happy in my surroundings. I have no loneliness or yearning for Gross-Breesen, as we are three here at one farm [a third boy known as 'Schwips' [Wolfgang Huelsman] was expected at Tythrop on 23 August]. I am working for the Tythrop-House with a farmer and actually earn money. My workplace belongs to the most beautiful sceneries of England...I sit on a hillock, the sun shines, I have a lunch break (1 hour)... around me sheep and young cattle...My farmer, too has essentially a dairy farm, a grass-farm. Make only hay, right through the whole year."

In spite of the positive reports above it is obvious from the archives that there were problems on the management side. Correspondence between solicitors representing Magdalen College, Botibol and Waley-Cohen (the original Lessees/Trustees and members of the Langham Committee), THAEL and the CCJR [the Council for German Jewry was re-named Central Council for Jewish Refugees in September 1939] in the Tythrop estate papers is extensive. A very complicated picture emerges, showing four bodies, at times, not communicating fully. Letters go backwards and forwards on the question of rent owed, responsibilities of lessees, creditors and the future prospects. Magdalen had not been happy with the change from the original Institute to THAEL, being particularly disturbed to hear that three of the four former lessees were not on the new committee; Henry Solomon was the only one who had transferred. They had refused to give THAEL the tenancy of Foxhill Farm, or to

recognize them as tenants of Tythrop House, maintaining that the Langham Committee, as the original lessees, were still responsible for both the house and the farm. Magdalen insisted, right to the end, that they would only discuss business with the Langham Committee.

At the end of August the CCJR had received disturbing reports from Professor Orwin, and from other unspecified quarters, and as a result had decided to withdraw 12 girls from the training scheme. For some time past they were aware that refugees applied for by Tythrop had not been able to be taken by them, the Committee had stepped in and placed them in order that they should not fall on relief. As a result the CCJR decided that it was undesirable that there should be a training institute for refugees over which they had no control and suggested that the Tythrop House Committee should be re-organised.<sup>79</sup> The proposal came up for discussion at the Executive Meeting of the CCJR on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1939, but as a letter had been received from Solomon saying that he was resigning, it was deferred and the Agricultural Committee was asked to look into the scheme.<sup>80</sup> On 5 October 1939 Mrs Rebecca Sieff, member of the Executive Committee of the CCJR, together with Desmond Hirschfield, Treasurer of the Agricultural Committee, visited Tythrop to inspect the property and the institution. They also discussed a question of insubordination with Mr Max Perl, [Manager of the Oxford branch of Marks & Spencer] now Treasurer of THAEL, and Captain Upfold, the Resident Warden, Assistant Treasurer and Acting Secretary, and representatives of the Internal Committee. Sieff reported that they had found Tythrop House the most impressive of all the centres visited: it was clean, orderly and functioning well as a community and an institution. They felt it was well worth assisting, it had the potential to develop into a self-supporting unit if it could be 'freed from unnecessary disturbing elements'. Sieff proposed herself, with Perl and Hirschfield, as new trustees to whom the present lease could be assigned, or a new lease granted. With regard to the minimum amount of money needed to keep the institution going for the following four or five weeks pending the decision of the Government with regard to refugee labour, Perl requested 7/- per head to be provided by the CCJR.<sup>81</sup>

Magdalen was concerned about the proposal for



the further change of assignment of the original lease, they said they could only approve of it if two of the original lessees joined afresh in the transaction to guarantee the payment of the rent, and the performance of the covenants of the Lease. At the same time Lee & Pembertons were pressing for the payment of the insurance premium and rent, namely £110/12/0 which was due on 29 September.<sup>82</sup> Sieff, as one of the proposed new trustees, had been sent a copy of the lease and estimated that £1,273 had been spent on the house and garden, claiming that it had been turned from a completely derelict property into a valuable asset. She made a case for the assignment of the lease to the proposed new trustees rent-free in consideration of the improvements which had been carried out:

“Such a gesture would be greatly appreciated, especially at the present moment when we are faced with ever increasing difficulties in all directions in our refugee work owing to the war emergency.”

Magdalen replied that it was debarred by the Universities and Colleges Estate Act from letting any property for less than the best rent that could easily be obtained. They also disagreed that a large sum had been spent on the garden by the refugees, the fruit and vegetable garden had been clear and in very good order when handed over.<sup>83</sup>

By January 1940 Magdalen had become seriously concerned about the rent due both for the house and the farm as, in spite of repeated demands, nothing had been paid. Amounts due for the house from February to December 1939 were £145/4/10 and for the farm from 25 March to 25 December 1939 £189/0/0.<sup>84</sup> Botibol and Waley-Cohen had disclaimed any liability for Foxhill Farm and were negotiating for THAEL to repay £2,000 owed to them, and £1,000 owed to the OCS, by selling off the stock on the farm and then assigning their tenancy to the OCS. Magdalen was not anxious for this to happen as the farm was, in their opinion, in excellent order and should be maintained in that condition and worked to its maximum capacity during the forthcoming season. They understood that the refugees were working well under Upfold who was doing an excellent job. The College felt that it would have no difficulty in finding a new tenant. As far as the house was concerned, negotiations for assignment to Sieff,

Perl and Hirschfield had fallen through as they were no longer personally interested in any transactions dealing with the property. As there was no possibility of the assignment of the lease being carried out, Magdalen's solicitors suggested that a writ should be issued against Messrs Botibol, Waley-Cohen and Solomon for the payment of rent.<sup>85, 86</sup>

A memorandum on the affairs of Tythrop was prepared by Hirschfield for discussion by the Executive Committee of the CCJR, planned for 22 February 1940. The memorandum summarised the problems faced by the interested parties, putting Tythrop into a national context as decisions were being made on the future of refugees. The Agricultural Committee, which following resignations at the outbreak of WWII from THAEL, had made a supplementary grant of £250 to the scheme and had tentatively taken over the management, came up with some proposals. As the OCS were owed money for foodstuffs and grocery, supplied on Household Account and cattle foods, etc. on Farm Account, and were pressing for payment, the memorandum suggested payment to them of a weekly sum of about £40 to £50. As only 34 refugees were left, after a number of trainees had been placed in alternative employment and more would shortly go, the weekly sum payable to the OCS would further decrease. In the summary of the financial position it was found that 68 shares had been sold at £1 each, liabilities including creditors and rent were £1,919; assets including furniture, bedding live and dead stock £2740.

The Agricultural Committee recommended two alternative methods of dealing with the future of Tythrop. One would be the voluntary winding up, and transfer of assets and liabilities to the OCS, who would then pay from £700-£850 to the Agricultural Committee, which would be sufficient to maintain the 34 trainees left until alternative employment or enlistment in the Army Pioneer Corps could be arranged. The other alternative, the continued existence of Tythrop House as an agricultural training centre under the control of the Agricultural Committee, was attractive to the CCJR as it no longer owned any as those it had been responsible for e.g. Manor Farm, Tingrith and Apsley Town, East Grinstead had become self-supporting units. In addition, Tythrop was the only centre for non-Zionists; apparently combining Zionists and non-Zionists did not work from an

educational point of view. The YMCA had training centres [they ran a training farm at Hambleden] for boys and girls up to the age of 19, but nothing for adults. The possibilities of training at Tythrop were very good as there was sufficient livestock, agricultural implements and a tractor to give the trainees an all-round farming experience. Since the outbreak of war, farm stock had considerably increased in price and would further appreciate in value if the war continued. If the debt to the OCS was paid off the Council would own the livestock and dead stock of the farm, and would easily be able to dispose of the asset. Whatever was decided it had to be done as soon as possible, as Magdalen was about to issue a writ against the Management Committee of Tythrop.<sup>87</sup>

However, by the time this memorandum came up for discussion at the proposed meeting on 22 February 1940, Magdalen had received the following telephone message from the Ministry of Defence: 'Major Wood of the 61<sup>st</sup> Divisional Headquarters rang to say that they proposed to requisition Tythrop House for a Regiment of Artillery. He understands that some Jewish refugees had leased the house'.<sup>88</sup> Initially the military authorities wanted to take possession on 2 March, the refugees started packing their belongings and cleaning the place down ready to hand over. There were only about 16 refugees left at that stage and other accommodation was being found for them. Further communication from the South Midland Area Headquarters postponed the taking over as the unit they planned to put in had been accommodated elsewhere, this gave extra time for the refugees to organise their departure.<sup>89</sup> In addition to Tythrop House, the military authorities wished to requisition a grass field lying immediately to the north and north-east of the garden for the purpose of a tented camp for 600 men. They informed Magdalen that the permission of the Land Commissioner had been asked but asked for their opinion of the proposal.<sup>90</sup> The College wrote to the Executive Officers of the War Agricultural Executive Committees for Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire asking for their support to refuse the request, they were concerned that it would interfere with the food production campaign. The College subsequently opposed the request:

"The College would like to help you in every way...but we feel compelled to oppose the

requisitioning of the field lying immediately to the north of Tythrop House, viz O.S. No.28 measuring 42.459 acres, as this field is essential to the proper working of Mr Lanchbury's holding of 166½ acres. Its requisitioning, which would cut his farm in half and deprive him of almost the only dry grassland on the holding, would compel him to dispose of his dairy herd and upset the whole balance of his farming...When the small portion of the field was enclosed with the new road last year we had to allow Mr Lanchbury 43/9d. an acre for the land thus lost to him...<sup>91</sup>"

The CCJR, at its meeting on 22 February, decided that as Tythrop was to be taken over by the military the scheme should be wound up on the lines indicated in their Memorandum. It was agreed that the payment of the rent for Foxhill Farm should be paid by the Council and a cheque for £191/5/0, less an allowance for pigsties of £2/5/0, for three-quarters rent was received by Lee & Pembertons on 27 February. Still expressing concern over who the College tenants were, they wrote to the Estates Bursar:

"The point to consider now is whether you are content to allow the tenancy of Foxhill Farm to remain on the basis that Messrs Botibol, Cohen and Solomon (or the Langham Committee) are the College tenants or whether we are to re-open negotiations with Mrs Sieff, Mr Hirschfield and Mr Perl for a new and definite tenancy of the Farm on the terms which had been previously arranged... We note what you say as to the Military having taken over Tythrop House. We have also heard from Messrs Linklaters on the same subject who say that the Military Authorities... will have to pay the lessees occupation rent and compensation and this, together with the money held in blocked account, will provide funds for the payment of the rent and the only question for the lessees to bear in mind will be whether, in due course, they should terminate the lease at the first available date for breaking.<sup>92</sup>"

By early March Upfold was only able to give a part of his time to the farm as he still had his duties to perform at the School of Rural Economy and with very few refugees left the farm was showing signs of neglect.<sup>93</sup> James Jordan, Auctioneer, Land

Agent and Agricultural Valuer, visited the farm, on behalf of Magdalen, on 11 March:

“I was at the above Farm on Saturday afternoon with Captain Upfold and the Manager of the Oxford Co-operative Society and arranged with him to employ Mr Tapping for a week or two to try to tidy the place up...I personally think that before I take another prospective tenant to view I had better wait for say a week or ten days to give them an opportunity to put the place in better order. Arrangements have been made for a contractor to plough up the pasture field that they had started and made such a bad state of.<sup>94</sup>”

Jordan was also trying to negotiate with Jackson Stops & Staff to settle the matter of dilapidations and the outstanding ingoing Tenant Right Valuation of £147/10/0 which should have been settled with Wickham when they took over the remainder of his agreement.<sup>95</sup> Some progress had been made, however, with the surrender of the tenancy of Foxhill as Waley-Cohen, Botibol and Solomon had agreed to surrender on the basis that the rent was paid up to 25 March and also any amount properly due for dilapidation, such sum to be agreed by the Estate Agents for the “respective parties”<sup>96</sup> Payment of £63, provided by the CGJ Agricultural Committee, for rent on Foxhill due to 25 March 1940, was received on 6 April 1940. Linklater were writing to Jackson, Stops & Staff asking if they could act as assessors and if a satisfactory arrangement was made they would inform Lee in order that they might meet Jordan for the purpose of settling the question of dilapidations.<sup>97</sup>

On 9 April 1940 the *Thame Gazette* carried the following advertisement:

“Auction Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1940, at 11.45a.m. Foxhill Farm, Kingsey. Adjoining the Thame – Princes Risborough Road, 2 miles from Thame and 5 from Risborough. Sale of farming stock including 4 cart mares, 54 head cattle, 41 Down ewes, 67 pigs, 250 R.I. pullets. Fordson tractor 1939, Ransome tractor plough, Roberts elevator, wagons, carts and harness. To be conducted on the premises by Messrs. Burrows and Bradfield in conjunction with James Jordan by direction of Tythrop House Agricultural Estates Ltd.<sup>98</sup>”

The auction was successful, all live and dead

stock etc. were sold and Upfold vacated the farm within the next few days. Lee & Pembertons queried if Magdalen would be pursuing a claim for damages representing 5 weeks rent from 25<sup>th</sup> March, and if so they suggested that it should be added to the claim which Jordan was settling with Jackson, Stops & Staff.<sup>99</sup>

On 8 May 1940 Mr Raphael Lewis, in partnership with Mr Pennington of Nobles Farm, West Wycombe, took over Foxhill. Jordan suggested that the College should have only one Tenant and as Mr Lewis was financially sound and known to Jordan he should be the one. He also suggested that Pennington should start work as soon as possible to get the arable land cropped. The field that was started to be ploughed up was not being touched until the amount of damage was agreed. He had also had to arrange for some dead sheep to be buried.<sup>100</sup>

As far as Tythrop House was concerned matters were more straightforward. The College Foreman of Works, and the Military Clerk of Works, had met on site to investigate the condition of the property before handing it over to the army, a detailed schedule of fixtures and fittings and any damage was prepared.<sup>101</sup> Rent due on the house up to 25 December of £145 was paid on 2 April 1940, as was the annual fire insurance premium up to 25 March 1940.<sup>102</sup> Finally, on 9 April £36/5/0 was paid, being one quarter due 25 March 1940 at £145 p.a.<sup>103</sup>

The refugees left the house and the farm, thus ending a quite extraordinary four years in the history of Tythrop and Magdalen College, a time in which they played a part in two international dramas. Magdalen had to wait until 1948, after de-requisitioning, before it could sell the house and grounds, freeing itself from an investment which had been more of a drain than a profit. Thanks to the help of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society the house was saved from demolition and has subsequently been restored to its former glory.

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