

## Cologne's Conscience

After my mother's death in London ten years ago, it was with apprehension that I made plans to have the personal effects of several generations of my Jewish family brought over to Cologne again. It wasn't an easy decision; a large proportion of the things came with my family in the 1930's, as they fled from Germany to London. Should I bring them over to Germany again, 70 years later? It would be a risqué and controversial step, which the dead might not be in agreement with.

My grandfather's two sisters Ella and Grete (née Unger), for instance, who were murdered. Some, like their parents Flora and Samuel Unger, survived the concentration camp Theresienstadt; others survived somehow on the run in Germany; yet others again managed to get out to England – like my parents Sylvia Unger and Peter Ury, who met each other in England.

Some objects like porcelain and records, I have kept, as has my brother in London. But the greater part of the inherited personal effects entailed also large amounts of tape recordings, letters, documents and the my grandfather's library: Alfred H. Unger was a dramatist, journalist and Head Artistic Director of UFA (Universum Film AG, the principal film studio in Germany).

Because of his many translations of English stage productions and also because of the organisation of Care Packages sent to Cologne from England after the war, he was awarded the "Großes Verdienstkreuz" (Larger Order of Merit) in 1983, for his work furthering German-British détente. Alo, as we called him, founded the German speaking PEN-Club in exile, together with Thomas Mann, in Belsize Park North London. The documents and photos surrounding this event, his Orders of Merit and an album of press articles on the premiere of his theatre piece „Menschen wie Du und Ich“ (People like You and Me” in Berlin, with which he won the Schiller Prize – all this now lies in the rubble of the Historical City Archives.

As artist and writer in the early nineties, I moved from England to Cologne, to do reappraisal work in Germany, in the family tradition (re the Nazi past). My mother's cousin Annette Pringle (née Felske) from Boston (originally from Cologne) informed me in 1998 that after his death, the estate of my grandfather's younger brother Wilhelm Unger had been put in storage at the Historical Archive, so one might consider depositing other valuable family history documents there. Wilhelm Unger, together with Heinrich Böll und Paul Schallück was a founder of the Germania Judaica (The Cologne Library for the History of German Judaism) and the Kölnische Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Society for Jewish-Christian Cooperation in Cologne), He saw to it that in 1949, his former employer at the "Cologne News", the DuMont-Verlag (publishers), was to receive official approval from the British military authorities, for a new daily "The Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger" (Cologne City Advertiser). For many years, Wilhelm wrote for the Stadt-Anzeiger on music and theatre in the feuilleton ([http://www.exilpen.de/HTML/Texte/fred\\_ungertext\\_060118.html](http://www.exilpen.de/HTML/Texte/fred_ungertext_060118.html)). All his documents now lie buried, so to speak, between the fallen walls of the City Archives.

Dr. Illner, my contact at the archive (who was appointed Director of The Historical Centre in Wuppertal in September 2008), demonstrated real personal engagement in his packing of the numerous cartons and the driving of a truck over to Cologne. When Eberhard Illner gave me a tour of the Archive space in 1999, he showed me the estate of

the Cologne dancer and choreographer Ernest Berk, fled Germany with his Jewish wife. I knew Ernest from my childhood, because my father had composed music and played piano for his modern dance pieces. Ernest (Ernst) Berk had made thousands of recordings of sounds, before the term "sampling" existed and before the computer was applied to music. All these tapes are now also lying under rubble.

With the family estate, a part of my family history is also buried - the life in England after the war. My father, who came from Ulm, was a close friend of the theatre director Peter Zadek – Zadek was also a Jewish refugee. Zadek and Ury wrote a children's opera together in the early 1950's.

It had already been decided that these documents and all other of my father's compositions now lying buried under the ruins, should be sent to the Nazi Documentation Centre in Ulm, because, as Dr. Illner assured me, such effects are to be made available to all German museums. And it is only a few weeks ago that I suggested to Dr. Karola Fings, a member of staff at the EL-DE-Haus in Cologne, that this Nazi Documentation Centre should also make use of our family archive.

We do not have copies of these papers, there were too many objects and we were confident that these would be secure in the Archive. The Historical Archive was not only the memory of Cologne but also the conscience; it took on my family archive as a valuable testimonial to the history of a Jewish family. During my childhood we Londoners regularly visited family members in Cologne. I recall Cologne totally devastated after the war. The fact that all important traces of my family now lies under further rubble, is as though they had died a second time.

Over the coming months we will discover who, exactly is responsible for this catastrophe. But it is already clear that one dealt irresponsibly with this Archive of memory and conscience, when building plans were put into action that might damage this building and endanger lives.

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#### **Artist's Writings & Publications**

2009 (22.4) "Cologne's Conscience" (German), article on the collapse of the Historisches Archiv (Historical Archives) by Ury in the Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger (Cologne City Advertiser) (D): „Guten Morgen Köln!“ (Good morning Cologne!) online 22nd April from 9 am  
<http://www.ksta.de/html/artikel/1239772090094.shtml> /