

The Hitler Emigres by Daniel Snowman.

Chatto and Windus, 2002. £20.00

The benign legacy of Nazi hatred was the influx into Britain, America and other countries – all too few – of Jewish refugees, the pessimists who managed to escape as the skies over Germany darkened. Many of these refugees did not just gain sanctuary in their adopted countries but embraced them and sought to make a contribution to them.

The Hitler Emigrés describes the cultural impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism, and by the time one has read the book it is impossible not to conclude that the life, culture and attainments of Britain in the twentieth century would have been very different without the presence of these unexpected citizens.

The names say it all: Gombrich and Pevsner, Popper and Hobsbawm, Perutz and Chain, Mikes, Moser and Weidenfeld, to name but a very few. The impact of these great individuals, and many more besides, can hardly be overestimated, and it is understandable that the author should give them a much deserved prominence.

It is however, worth noting that with the 'great and the good' there came thousands of others, ordinary men and women, without extraordinary talents, but with a similar determination to put down roots in this country and give something back for the sanctuary they received. Some too made great successes of their lives and contributed hugely to their local communities even though their names may be known only to a few.

This excellent book tells part of the story, but there remains a further 7/8ths below the surface without which the prominent remainder cannot be set in its truest context.

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