EDITORIAL

It seems peculiarly appropriate that I should be writing this while living in Potsdam, as it is a most apt place from which to be contemplating the issue of a heritage constructed with mortar, stone, or wood and placed upon the landscape of Europe. Here, in Potsdam, I live in a city which was laid waste by the Allies at the end of the war, a process which was then largely hurried along by a Communist dictatorship. They had no desire to be reminded of the glories that had been Prussia, and were only too glad to be rid of the hated symbols of Germany's past. How much should be reconstructed is a subject of ongoing, heated discussion in the shadow of the *Wende*, the reunification of East and West Germany.

Surely, these are not attitudes which should apply to the Jewish built heritage, and yet, as our various essays from different parts of Europe show us, there has been little desire on the part of the various Jewish communities to appreciate their past history, often allowing it to dissolve before their eyes. In Germany, the small Jewish community after the war was helpless in the face of the 'second destruction', as the remnants of Jewish buildings were demolished during a frenzied period of reconstruction. There was no burning necessity for Jewish buildings to be demolished in England, yet England has a poor record in this respect, and Edward Jamilly and Sharman Kadish underscore the enormity of what has been lost. In recent years, they have been at the forefront of the battle to record England's patrimony and make the wider public aware of what is fast vanishing. A similarly woeful tale is brought to our attention from France by Dominique Jarrassé, but there are some small signs of reassurance for the future to be found there. Alla Sokolova and Valery Dymshits bring a Russian dimension into this report of a European Jewish community which is in the process of reconstructing its history, utilising the debris left behind after the storm. The often sentimental memories of Eastern European Jewish life are difficult to find in a landscape which has suffered as much as the people who once lived there. My own contribution is based on observations made during the time I have spent in Germany in recent years. A question often arises: 'Does this reconstruction serve the needs of Germans who need reminders that Jews once lived here and contributed to the German culture? Is a former synagogue

building, now a museum or a place for “German-Jewish dialogue” needed when the emerging, largely Russian Jewish communities again need synagogues?’ The question remains open.

It was useful for Helen Fry’s article to lead off this section. Somehow, entering the English scene where the drama is quiet and muted, one gains a better understanding of the Jewish presence in a land where a quiet revival could take place. Helen Fry takes us back to an earlier English period, into an area where very few Jews were thought to have lived, and shows what can be uncovered by the assiduous use of available sources.

Museums have been misused before. Visiting Prague, one is reminded of the Nazi attempt to create a ‘museum for a vanished race’ – which did not succeed. Our own work at Kent House with the Czech Memorial Scrolls is a more than adequate reply to this. Perhaps that is why Oliver Lubrich’s essay on the ‘other and the ordinary’ is so relevant now. The Jew as a stereotype in our society, placed into a museum structure where he can be excluded, is an inheritance of the last century. The ‘demystification’ of the Jew must take place on many levels.

Tom Freudenheim’s lecture on the role of museums in the world of today rises out of his experience of museum work, which includes many major museums in the United States, his recent position as the director of the new Berlin Jewish Museum, and his current work here in Great Britain. We must learn how to renew our relationship with the visible remainders of our past; and the politically correct world, with all its dangers, still contains tools which will help us reclaim the past.

Having examined the tangible remains of previous Jewish communities, the other part of this edition looks at some of the issues facing contemporary Jewish community life. The Leo Baeck College, under its Partners in Leadership programme, arranged a series of lectures on a variety of topics around contemporary congregational structures. We are happy to publish a number of them together in this issue. In this series, Sheila Shulman examined the impact of women on the rabbinate and has updated her previous paper with interspersed comments. Dr John Launer used his skills as a family therapist to examine approaches to community life and Professor Margaret Harris allowed us to reprint her paper from ten years ago with the reservation that more research has obviously been done in the intervening period.

We have learned not to generalise. Jewish identity is achieved within various patterns, and what may be a proper response to the English scene cannot be applied to a land where Jewish life was totally destroyed and few Jews remain to rebuild a new presence in a poisoned world. We study the pictures of the old wooden synagogues, become nostalgic when we consider

the ‘*haim*’ – but what can we say about the Jews in Poland today? Marius Gudonis shows us the anguished situation of young Jews in today’s Poland who may or may not choose a Jewish identity – and there is little we can do to help them. Still, we must reach out to them.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler was born in Germany and became the leader of American Reform Judaism until his death. He was always deeply proud of his Eastern European heritage, taught to him by his father, the Yiddish poet Elieser Schindler. He was our close personal friend, and all of us here at *European Judaism* mourn his death. We are grateful to Donald Day, his partner in much of the work within American Jewry, whose memorial tribute to Alex Schindler is a fitting climax to this issue. Alexander Schindler will not be forgotten by us.

The ancillary material of this issue – which is no less important for that – includes poetry and an essay-review of recent books about Vienna. As always, there is more which we desired for this issue – but the next issue is waiting in the wings.

Evelyn Friedlander