Obituary: Peter Pulzer
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The world of German, Austrian, and Jewish studies, but also that of comparative politics and British affairs, lost one of its great ones! Peter Pulzer lived the first nine years of his life in a turbulent Vienna witnessing a brief civil war between the Socialists and their clerical-conservative, Austro-fascist, and right-radical opponents, the triumph of Austro-Fascism, and its demise at the hand of the Nazis whose Anschluss in 1938 annulled Austria’s existence as an independent country. Peter grew up in a deeply assimilated, middle-class Jewish family that was close to the Social Democratic Party and had the young boy classified as konfessionslos in his elementary school devoid of Jewish kids where Peter was categorized alongside a few Protestant boys in a predominantly Catholic environment. Peter’s classification did not prevent him from being forced to attend a Jews-only school that was far away from his home. He witnessed how his father and grandfather were violently removed from their apartment and how his father joined the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde—the official organization of the Jewish community—much to his chagrin, since Peter’s father deemed himself completely a-religious as well as ethnically apart from Jews. It was not until Yom Kipur of 1938, when Peter was nine years old, that a family friend took Peter to a synagogue where Peter came to see the “Torah.” This friend also taught Peter Hebrew, which his parents accepted as constituting an asset for a possible emigration to Palestine. Other hopeful possibilities were the Anglophone world of Britain, Canada, the United States, and Australia, with Britain emerging as the ultimate option by dint of a retired Anglican clergyman from Hertfordshire sponsoring the family! Peter maintained close contact with this man’s family throughout his life.

Following grammar school, Peter was accepted in 1947 to King’s College of the University of Cambridge, where he read history and from which he was graduated in 1950. Four years later, Peter reentered King’s, where he pursued his doctoral studies and received a PhD in 1957. Seamlessly, Peter went to Oxford, where he became a lecturer in politics first at Magdalen and then at Christ Church College, where he remained until 1984. It was in 1985 that Peter was appointed the
Gladstone Professor of Government, one of the most distinguished chairs in British academia, which he held until his retirement in 1996 while also being a Fellow at All Souls, arguably among the most prestigious of the Oxford University colleges.

In 1964, Peter published *The Rise of Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, 1867–1914* (*Die Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland und Oesterreich, 1867–1914*) which was—and has remained—a genuine classic in the fields of modern European history, Jewish history, comparative politics, and—of course—German and Austrian studies. In this book, Peter addresses all problems that comprise the thorny and complex German-Jewish relations in the formation of modern state- and nation-building none more central than the eventual failure in creating a German-Jewish identity that was comfortable to both groups. Throughout the ensuing half a century, Peter continued to address the central themes of this struggle in many scholarly articles, as well as essays, reviews, and lectures in English and in German all over the world. Another major work ensued, *Jews and The German State: The Political History of a Minority*. He also published well-received books on Germany (*Germany 1870–1945: Politics, State Formation, and War*) and Austria (*Fifty Years of the Second Republic*) and remained a keen observer of and commentator on these countries’ daily politics throughout his life. Among the many honors that these two countries bestowed on Peter, perhaps none were more prestigious than the honorary doctorates that he received from the University of Innsbruck in 2006 and the University of Vienna in 2012. Peter also was an astute student of British politics, perhaps best embodied by a saying of his that has remained a mainstay for virtually all scholars of British politics: “British politics is about class. All else is embellishment and detail.” The fine British political scientist and Germany expert William Paterson, one of Peter’s dearest friends and colleagues, called this “the golden phrase that appeared in every exam paper.”

On a personal note, Peter’s book on the rise of antisemitism in Germany and Austria influenced me more than any other that I read as an undergraduate at Columbia University in the late 1960s. I owe the initial stages of my becoming involved with and interested in German politics to Peter’s book and his other writings. It was all the more special to finally meet the man in person at a Wahlbeobachtungsreise organized by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst in 1983, which then formed the basis of our close friendship until the day Peter died.