



# Jewish Family Secrets: The Lives and Memories of East European Migrants

47, Polbourne Grove,  
Salford 7,  
Lancashire  
M7 0D13.  
11<sup>th</sup> May 1972

My Dear Tony,  
Thanks for your letter  
and glad you are well.  
Regarding your queries  
I was born in GALICIA - AUSTRIA  
My sister name is CISSIE INGBER or  
RIBIERO married name, and BECKY INGBER  
and JANIE INGBER and of course myself  
ESTHER INGBER.  
The names of my parents were  
MILLIE BOWMAN <sup>married name</sup> INGBER and  
my father LOUIE INGBER  
my Mother father was named P.T.O

Letter of Esther Reece, Salford 7, to Tony Kushner, 11 May 1972

HENRY BOWMAN and my Grandmother  
was KATIE.  
When I was a little girl we  
lived in Austria in a small  
town by the name of ZBARAZ.  
I came to England with my  
family when I was ten years  
of age. I hope this is  
what you require give our love  
to Mum and the boys

Auntie Esther.  
X X X X X

11 May 1972

Regarding your queries:

I was born in GALICIA - AUSTRIA. My sisters name are  
CISSIE INGBER or RIBIERO married name and BECKY  
INGBER and JANIE INGBER and of course myself ESTHER  
INGBER.

The names of my parents were MILLIE BOWMAN married  
name INGBER and my father LOUIE INGBER. My mother's

father was named HENRY BOWMAN and my Grandmother  
was KATIE.

When I was a little girl we lived in Austria in a small  
town by the name of ZBARAZ. I came to England with my family  
when I was ten years of age. I hope this is what you require,  
give our love to Mum and the boys.

Auntie Esther

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Vilna.  
Fanny Glass = Samuel Gordon in Russia.  
3rd February.  
Harry, Ethel, Louis, Maurice, Joseph, Jenny,  
Solomon, Victor.  
Had to help my mother look after the  
family as it was a large one. He spoke  
"Yiddish" came over when 21, and spoke  
Polish. Came over from Russia, he had no  
trade so as it was the custom to travel  
with a pack of drapery. We were  
strictly orthodox.

My great, great, grandfather was a rabbi.  
Went to Israel to die from Hull!  
My great grandfather went exporting  
eggs and onions to England from Alexan-  
dria, Palestine (Israel) (1st World War.

May 1972, Tony Kushner Notes of Interview with Etie [Ethel]  
Kushner, Whitefield, North Manchester

~~My~~ Grandpa Kushner came from  
Vilna when 17. When in Russia he  
was in the Yeshiva. When he came to  
England he became a tailor. He was  
very learned in the tora.

~~Before my Grandpa~~ <sup>to England</sup> ~~came from Russia~~

## Vilna

[My mother] Fanny Glass married Samuel Gordon in Russia, 3rd February. [They had eight children]: Harry, Ethel, Louis, Maurice, Joseph, Jenny, Solomon and Victor.

I had to help my mother look after the family as it was a large one. He spoke Yiddish and came to England when he was 21, and spoke Polish. He came over from Russia, he had no trade so as it was the custom to travel with a pack of drapery. We were strictly orthodox.

My great, great grandfather was a rabbi. He went to Israel to die from Hull. My great grand father went exporting eggs and onions to England from Alexandria, Palestine (Israel) [sic] during the First World War.

Grandpa Kushner came from Vilna when 17. When in Russia he was in the Yeshiva. When he came to England he became a tailor.

He was very learned in the Torah.

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**These two documents were part of a *cheder* project I carried out as an eleven year old in the Cheshire Reform Synagogue in South Manchester. This was a fast-growing suburban Jewish community founded in the late 1950s – my parents had moved from north Manchester not so much out of economic advancement but because they needed a bungalow as my mother had contracted polio and could not manage stairs. There was limited such housing where they had come from which was still then the dominant part of Manchester Jewry and which consisted of different forms of orthodox practice.**

My *cheder* was anything but traditional and religion was only part of what was a very informal education taught by volunteer members of the congregation. A year later I remember we spent some time on a new publication by a senior member of the Reform Movement of Great Britain – Tony Bayfield's book entitled simply *Prejudice* which explored not just antisemitism but many other forms of racism – it was subtitled *Jewish Responses* and was aimed at social action. That must have made a major impact as this became an area I was and still am most exercised by.

Similarly, these documents were part of a programme for us to discuss our family roots and histories. I thus interviewed my oldest relatives – my father's mother on one side and my great aunt Esther on the other - thereby covering the varying origins of my ancestors – Lithuanian, Galician, Russian and Polish who came to England from the 1880s through to the 1920s. It was important enough for me to keep these documents which I was delighted to rediscover a few years ago tucked into other family records in my late mother's house – I remembered them clearly but had thought I had lost them.

The documents are thus interesting in three respects. First, they reveal an interest in roots from both second generation East European origin Jews in Britain (my *cheder* teachers) and from the third generation (myself and others in my year on the verge of our *barmitzvahs/batmitzvahs*). Whilst it would take a further decade to be realised, this interest was manifested in the Manchester Jewish Museum which opened in 1984 and reflected the story of ordinary Jews of that origin. Second, they reflect what my elderly female relatives thought

was interesting to relate. Both have a heavy genealogical element taking the story from Eastern Europe and to the north of England (Hull as the place of entry and settlement in one case and Manchester in the other). But they go beyond and tell something of everyday life, religious and secular, and other dynamics – for example gender is here if not explicitly labelled as such.

Third, they reveal elements of the immigrant story that are little known or written about. I am thinking especially of my grandmother remembering her father moving from being a pedlar to an egg and onion importer. I have not been able to verify the onion side of this trading but have found that not only he but a group of others in Hull – mainly Jewish, mainly immigrant – were involved in an activity that in the First World War especially, was extremely lucrative. It seems remarkable that eggs would be imported to England from Egypt but this reflected supply chains – even before the war, the Baltic was unreliable as a source of eggs because it would freeze over in winter and egg production in Britain was undeveloped. These networks of Jewish egg importers, largely based around the port of Hull, clearly maintained close trading links with Eastern Europe but were entrepreneurial enough to develop wider global connections to Egypt. These men reveal a positive side of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in turn of the twentieth century England – these traders were a mixture of East European Jewish, Scandinavian and German non-Jewish, as well as non-Jews from Hull itself passing on experience and contacts. Indeed, they were important enough to merit a British government Cabinet committee during the war to ensure the continuation of the egg supply for the home front. Linked to this intriguing history is a wonderful photograph of my great grandfather, Samuel Gordon, astride a camel looking every inch the dapper Englishman with the pyramids and Sphinx behind him, dated 1917. These then show the importance of family documents which manage to be both ordinary and extraordinary.

## Source commentary provided by:

Professor Tony Kushner  
James Parkes Professor of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations  
A.R.Kushner@soton.ac.uk