

MARGERY BOOTH – THE OPERATIC SPY

Introduction

In the Second World War, Margery Booth, a Wigan born, internationally acclaimed opera singer found herself in the heart of Berlin spying for the Allies.



If it wasn't for Margery's name being mentioned in the personal memoirs of World War Two soldier spy, John Brown DCM, which came to light after his death in 1964, her story would have gone untold. An autobiographical book based on Brown's memoirs, entitled 'In Durance Vile' was revised and edited by a fellow prisoner of war, New Zealander John Borrie in 1981.

Although world famous in her time, very little is known of Margery's private life. Also, the very nature of the Intelligence Services makes detailed information hard to come by concerning her time in Germany during the Second World War.

Using public records, newspaper reports and personal memoirs this extensive research encompasses her family history, singing career, war time exploits and details of the main characters in her life. It also puts into context the political and military situation in Europe at the time.

Booth Family History

Margery Myers Booth, the only child of Levi Booth and Florence Beatrice Myers Tetley, was born 25 January 1906 at 53 Hodges Street, Wigan. A bay windowed terraced property off Park Road to north of the town centre.

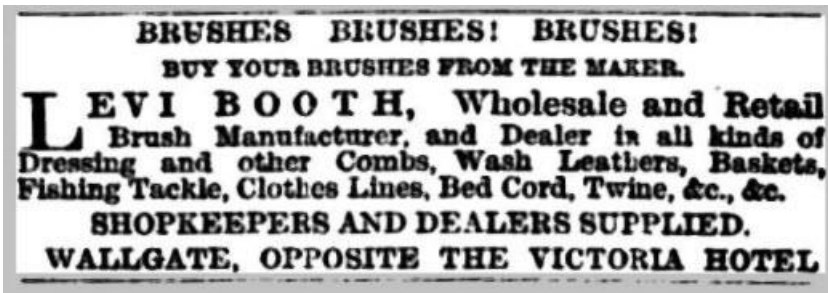


Census and parish records show that Margery's paternal line, the Booth's, were living in Bolton as far back as the late 1700's. Margery's grandfather, Levi Booth, who was born in 1838, started a business as a wholesale brush manufacturer in 1860 working from 41 Cheapside, Newport Street in Bolton. He married a Yorkshire girl, Caroline Roberts Jackson, on 6 August 1863 at St. John the Baptist church in Halifax. They were to have seven children, four boys and three girls.

The couple lived in Bolton for a few years but soon after their son Joseph's birth in 1867, Levi moved his family and business to Wigan. He is listed in the 1869 Slaters Trade Directory as a brush maker living at 47 Wallgate, opposite the Victoria Hotel, calling his business the 'Wigan Brush Works'.

The census of 2 April 1871 finds Levi, Caroline, two year old son Richard and two day old baby daughter Sarah living above their shop in Wallgate. At the time their two older children Walter and Joseph were staying with their grandparents near Halifax. It was at 47 Wallgate that Margery's father, also named Levi, was born in 1875. He was destined to become a brush maker like his father.

Levi later moved his premises from number 47 to 18 Wallgate, nearer to Market Place in the centre of town. Here he advertised that he was a brush wholesaler and retailer, also selling baskets, washing lines, cord and twine. A passionate angler himself, he was also a fishing tackle dealer.



By the time of the 1881 census Levi was employing four workers at his business in Wallgate but was now living at 29 Upper Dicconson St. As his business grew he moved to Sickfield House off Wigan Lane then out of

town to firstly Gathurst Lane in Shevington, then to Common Road in Parbold.

In 1906 he advertised in local newspapers that he was having a moving sale and relocating his business premises from Wallgate to 25-27 The Wiend, off Millgate.

In 1908 Levi was to lose his third eldest son Richard, aged 39, in tragic circumstances. Richard had been working as a commercial traveller for his father but had been in ill health for several years and had been unable to work for the previous month. On Saturday 20 November Levi received a letter from his son dated the previous day, as a consequence the Leeds & Liverpool Canal near Richard's home in Clarence Street in Ince was dragged. Richard's body was found with two handkerchiefs tied around his legs. At the inquest held in front of Coroner Brighouse the jury returned a verdict of 'Suicide while of unsound mind'.

His two older brothers had chosen to make their own way in life. Walter became a brewery manager in Bolton, whilst Joseph opened a shop in St. Helens selling general goods and brushes from the Wigan Brush Works. This left just Levi Jnr working in the family business in Wigan.

By 1911 Levi Snr and Caroline, who was now blind, had moved from Parbold back into Wigan. They were living above a shop at 25 Mesnes Street, opposite the Market Hall, that their divorced daughter Sarah was running. She was selling brushes that her brother Levi Jnr was producing in the Wiend.

Levi Snr died in 1915 in Lytham St. Annes. He had served as a Wigan Town Councillor for over a quarter of a century, being elected to represent the All Saints Ward in 1886. He served on all the Council committees and became an Alderman of the Borough in 1901.

As well as sitting as a Magistrate on the Borough bench he was also a Churchwarden of St. Thomas CE church in Wallgate where for a time he was an overseer of the poor. For over 30 years he was a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, a fraternal order, set up to provide care for the needy in a time before the NHS and the Welfare State. As well he was instrumental in setting up the Wigan & District Amalgamated Anglers Association and was its first President.

Levi Booth Snr was buried in Wigan Cemetery in Lower Ince in a double grave alongside his six month old daughter Sarah who had died in 1874 and his wife Caroline who had predeceased him two years previously. His son Richard, who had tragically drowned lay, in an adjoining grave.

Maternal Roots

Margery's mother, Florence Tetley came from an old Yorkshire family that can be traced back to the 1680's. In the 1800's they were cloth merchants in the Bradford area. Margery's maternal grandfather James Edward Tetley married a Manchester girl Sarah Elizabeth Myers in 1870. They then moved to Leigh and on the 1871 census are shown living at 71 Lord Street, James's occupation is shown as a coal proprietor.

James then seems to disappear from the picture and his whereabouts are unclear, the next official record is his death on 11 May 1898 in Queensland, Australia, aged 58. On the 1881 census Sarah is shown living with her parents Henry and Elizabeth Myers at 1 Florence St in Hindley with her one year old daughter Florence.

Sarah remarried under her maiden name of Myers on 12 April 1882 at St. James CE church in Poolstock, Wigan. Her new husband, who she was to have three children with, was Thomas Mort, a shoemaker and pawnbroker who had a business in Market Street, Hindley.

The census of 1901 shows that 22 year old Florence had left her step family and was once again living with her grandparents Henry and Elizabeth Myers in nearby Castle Hill. She married Levi Booth four months later on 17 July 1901 at All Saints CE church in Hindley.

Five years later, on 31 January 1906 a notice in the births, marriages and deaths section of the Wigan Observer & Advertiser announced the arrival of Margery Myers Booth into the world.

The 1911 census shows five year old Margery and her mother Florence were now living with her great grandparents Henry and Elizabeth Myers at 90 Barnsley Street, a terraced property just round the corner from her birth place in Hodges Street. Margery's father, Levi Jnr is shown as being at The Wiend, his business address in Wigan on the night of the census.

Margery's name first appeared in the newspaper when the Wigan Observer & District Advertiser dated 11 Jan 1913 showed Margery's name amongst the list of all the school children invited to Mayor Edward Dickinson's Juvenile Ball at the Pavillion Theatre in Library St, Wigan.

A New Life in Southport

It was around this time that Levi relocated his family to the Meols Cop district of Southport, moving into a semi detached house at 87 Clifton Road. Levi commuted daily to his business in Wigan and Margery attended the nearby Norwood Primary school.

The first written record of Margery performing live is an article in the Southport Advertiser reporting that she sang in an operetta in St. Luke's church on Good Friday, 10 April 1914, aged eight. The following year, her great grandparents Henry and Elizabeth Myers moved from Wigan to live with them in retirement at Clifton Road.

Alas all was not well in her parents' marriage, in 1918 they separated. Levi petitioned for divorce from Florence, on the grounds of her misconduct with a man named William Fairhurst at his home in Clifton Road. Fairhurst was said to keep an off licenced house in Woodhouse Lane, Wigan. He told Mr. Justice Shearman that his wife had taken to drink and they then entered into a deed of separation. A Decree Nisi was granted in 1919.

Margery's parents both remarried in 1920. Her father married Ada Sidebotham in July at Hope St Congregational Chapel in Wigan town centre. Ada had been living above his brush shop in the Wiend for a number of years. Her brother was Ezra Sidebotham, a printer of long standing, who also had premises in the Wiend.

Her mother Florence married William Fairhurst, 20 years her senior, at Ormskirk Register Office in September. William, whose father was a publican, had been in the brewery trade all his life and described on various censuses as barman, brewer, mineral water bottler and publican.

Margery's talent as a singer had been recognised at an early age and it was after her mother's second marriage that she was given the chance of professional training as an opera singer.

At the age of 14 she started on the long road to stardom which would require dedication and years of hard work. Opera singers have to be extraordinarily disciplined, mastering the art of acting and stage presence. Being bilingual and the ability to sing in several languages is essential therefore the study of foreign languages at music school is mandatory.

Margery firstly began a two year course of singing lessons in Bolton under the tuition of Welshman Richard Evans, an ex-miner from Ruabon near Wrexham. There then followed a move down to London for six months private tuition with Eileen D'Orme in Knightsbridge.

She then attended the prestigious Guildhall School of Music for a further two years training to perfect her mezzo soprano voice. In 1924 she won the Mercer Scholarship of 50 Guineas, which she repeated the following year, also gaining the Liza Lehman prize of 10 Guineas.



It was whilst at the Guildhall School that she met and struck up a friendship with a young German student who was staying in the same digs. His name was Egon Strohm and he was in London studying English language. They both went their separate ways to pursue their careers but were destined to meet again.

The Journey to Berlin and Fame

On completion of her training Margery found it difficult to secure engagements and after an illness travelled to Switzerland in order to recuperate. It was here she was advised to go to Berlin to pursue her dream of being a professional opera singer.

In 1928 she made a successful audition with the Berlin State Opera House (*Staatsoper Unter den Linden*). The iconic building, close to the Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate and built by Frederick the Great in 1741 had just reopened after a two year refurbishment.

After a further six months training under the tutelage of the famous French soprano, Lola Artot de Padilla she signed a one year contract and made her first appearance in Berlin that year, a minor part in the opera 'La Tosca'.

Margery soon became a favourite with Berlin audiences. In 1930 she had a lead part in the new German opera 'Der Fremde Erde', an honour rarely accorded to foreigners.

On 17 Aug 1932 the Lancashire Evening Post published a short article with the headline banner 'A Southport Girl Who Sings in Berlin', Margery is quoted as saying:

"I love coming back to Southport for a holiday, but I love Germany so much now that I would not like to leave it. If you have talent the German people will back you up, second rate is not sufficient, nor will they find excuse for an artist who is out of condition. The Germans don't think the English have any talent and will only believe you are English when you have thoroughly convinced them".

Little did she know that the following year events would unfold that would lead to Germany becoming a Fascist Dictatorship, the destruction of Europe in the Second World War and the end of her singing career.



her singing career.

1933 was an eventful year for Margery, her mentor Lola de Padilla, whom she had served her apprenticeship under, died in Berlin on 12 April.

A few weeks later on 9 May her mother Florence died of cancer, aged 54. She was buried in Duke Street Cemetery in Southport. alongside her grandparents Henry and Elizabeth Myers who had died during the Great war in 1915 and 1918 respectively.

Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933. It was through his love of classical music that Hitler's and Margery's paths were to cross a few months later. After five years at the Berlin State Opera she was now a principal singer and the only English Prima Donna in Berlin, singing in German, French, Italian and Spanish.

That year she was invited to sing at the Bayreuth Festival in northern Bavaria, and was chosen to carry the Holy Grail in the opera 'Parsifal' which opened on 22 July.

Hitler had an almost fanatical devotion to the work of the 19th-century German composer Richard

Wagner, which to him represented everything that was good about culture in Nazi Germany. His attendance at the Bayreuth Festival was very well publicised by Joseph Goebbels, the Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

Margery revealed in an interview with the Lancashire Daily Post in December 1933 that she had met Hitler and also Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia and his wife Cecilie, the Duchess of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. She told the reporter:

"I had dinner with Herr Hitler and the Crown Prince and his wife. I received a beautiful bouquet of red roses and the people I met were all very charming. The ex-Crown Princess introduced me to her friends as 'her baby' and has promised to promote a concert at Potsdam at which I shall sing".

The Crown Prince or 'Little Willie' as he was known as, was a passionate devotee of opera. He admired Margery's singing and they were to become firm friends, this friendship was to prove invaluable a decade later.

During a later interview with the Liverpool Echo in 1936 she recounts that after her performance she was presented to Adolph Hitler and said of him:

"He was perfectly charming and they talked about art and music". Margery was to become one of Hitler's favourite singers.

Held annually in July since 1876 the Bayreuth Festival is a month long performance of operas presented by the Wagner family. Performances take place in a specially designed theatre, the 'Bayreuth Festspielhaus' which Wagner personally supervised the design and construction of.

The overall Director was English born Winifred Marjorie Wagner (*nee Williams*). Originally from Hastings in Sussex and orphaned at an early age, she was sent to live with relatives in Germany. She married 46 year old Siegfried, the bisexual son of Richard Wagner at the age of 18 in 1915.

She took over the running of the Festival after her husband's death in 1930 until the end of World War II in 1945. A personal friend and supporter of Adolf Hitler, she maintained a regular correspondence with him. They had met in 1923, the year that Hitler was jailed for his part in the Munich Beer Hall Putsch. She sent him food parcels and stationery in Landsberg Prison, on which it is thought he wrote his autobiography 'Mein Kampf'.

Her anti Semitic views led to her joining the Nazi Party in 1926 and in the late 1930's she served as Hitler's personal translator during treaty negotiations with Britain.

Margery's father Levi died on 12 August 1933 in Wigan, aged 58, whilst Margery was performing at Bayreuth. He was buried three days later in Wigan Cemetery, Lower Ince, alongside his parents and sister Martha Annie who had died aged five and half months in 1874. Margery's parents had both remarried in 1920 and by a quirk of fate she was to lose them both in the same year.

In late 1933 Margery was hospitalised in Berlin, after an operation she started a period of recuperation which included a visit back to Southport for a short holiday.

The following year she was invited back to Bayreuth, this time with the solo role of a flower maiden in the opera 'Parsifal' and of Flosshilde, a Rhine maiden in the opera 'Gotterdammerung'. In the lavish production 1,500 costumes were used and 800 people employed, 137 musicians alone.

At the time no one was aware that Margery was unwell again and had sung at least 20 times at Bayreuth in agonising pain, this led to her undergoing surgery again. She wrote to her step father

William from her hospital bed in Erlangen, just north of Nuremberg in Bavaria, telling him she had had an operation for an internal complaint.

Hitler expressed concern and gave orders that she was to be well looked after and Goering and Goebbels sent messages of sympathy. The Queen of Denmark also sent good wishes and invited her to her country to sing. It was after a two month recovery that Margery was fit enough to start singing again.

Recognition at Home

Although famous in Germany and on the continent Margery was up to now virtually unknown at home. After her success at Bayreuth this was about to change.

In 1935 she was invited to sing at the Promenade Concerts, more commonly known as the Proms, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Queens Hall in London. *(The building was destroyed in the Blitz in 1941 and the proms then moved to it's new home at the Albert Hall).*



The Proms Concerts were broadcast on the radio and soon Margery's voice was to be heard in every home in the land. After years of hard work she was finally getting the recognition she deserved.

Following her mother's death from cancer, Margery became a keen supporter of cancer charities and research. Whilst based in London singing with the BBC orchestra she took the opportunity to sing in a benefit concert at the Palace Theatre in the West End, in aid of the Holt Radium Institute which had amalgamated with Christies Cancer Hospital in Manchester two years previously.

On 4 Oct 1935 she sang professionally for the first time outside of London when she performed at a concert at the Queens Hall, Market Street in her home town of Wigan.

Now at the height of her fame, 1936 was a busy year for Margery. Her new contract with the Berlin Opera stipulated that she spend seven months of the year in Berlin, singing on 60 nights during that

time. During the other five months she was allowed to undertake tours.

She finally fulfilled her greatest ambition of singing at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, London on 27 April when she played the role of Magdalene in Wagner's opera 'Die Meistersinger'. That year she was to create a record 23 appearances in the Covent Garden opera season.

It was after her successful debut in London that she announced her engagement to Egon Strohm, the German who she had first met as a student in London eleven years previously.

She had hoped to marry Egon in a quiet ceremony in her adopted town of Southport four months later. However the news of her impending marriage leaked out, not wanting to turn her special day into a media circus she cancelled the wedding indefinitely on the pretence that she was suffering from influenza.

She then secretly rearranged for the wedding to go ahead the next day with only herself, Egon and the Vicar in the know, with the guests to be only informed at the last possible moment.

Such was the secrecy that the officiating minister Rev. Canon Walter Morris, the Rural Dean of North Meols, was only given one hours notice of the time of the ceremony. He married Margery and Egon by special licence at All Saints CE church in Rawlinson Road the next day, Wednesday 26 August.

Margery's stepfather William Fairhurst gave her away. The best man, Thomas Forshaw, the Managing Director of Burtonwood Breweries at Newton Le Willows, near Warrington was unable to make it in time and missed the ceremony completely, only arriving in time for the reception at Margery's family home. A neighbour from Lethbridge Road, fifty six year old Hubert Hunt, was drafted in at the last minute to be the second witness.

Margery and Egon spent their honeymoon in Scotland before returning to Germany. In an interview with the Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser she is quoted as saying;

"When in England, nothing delights me more than go north and sing among my own people".

A German Husband

Margery's new husband Dr. Egon Strohm was born 24 Oct 1904 in Trossingen in the State of Baden-Wurttemberg, the picturesque Black Forest region of south west Germany. His father Christian, was a member of a prominent Brewing family and lived in a villa he had built in 1925 in Schweningen, a town close by Trossingen where Egon was born.



The brewery in Trossingen was founded in the late 19th century and by 1904 it was known as 'Zum Baeren' and owned by Johannes Strohm. It was renamed the 'Baerenbrauerei' in 1920. The family operated a second brewery in the nearby town of Schweningen with the owners being Gebrueder Strohm (*Strohm Brothers*). The brewery used a bear as its symbol and this became as famous as the animals on the State crest, a lion, stag and griffon.

Egon didn't enter into the family business but instead pursued an academic career. After University he moved to Berlin where on 14 August 1928 he married Elisabeth Martha Czaika. The marriage banns show he was a 23 old student living at Prinzregentenstrasse 83, Wilmersdorf in the south west suburbs of the

city. Elizabeth, also 23, had been born in Lodz, Poland.

The marriage was not to last very long however. It was dissolved in Jan 1930 and Elizabeth reverted back to her maiden name, marrying for a second time to Raimond Fredrich Anton Spitzer on 4 April 1931.

During the 1930's Egon worked as a journalist and radio reporter, whilst also studying for his Doctorate degree at Heidelberg University. In 1935 he qualified as a Doctor of Law and Economics after writing a dissertation for his PhD. entitled 'The British Empire as an Economic Entity'.

At some point after Margery's arrival in Berlin, which coincided with Egon's first marriage, the pair eventually renewed their friendship from their student days in London and this led to a romance and marriage in England.

With her new contract giving her more freedom, Margery spent her time touring and commuting between Germany, England and America. She made a flying visit to Lancashire on 31 January 1937 to sing in a Manchester concert in aid of Christies Cancer Hospital and to visit Southport.

Egon met up with her in Southport after a trip to New York, arriving in Southampton on 16 March on SS Westernland, a German owned transatlantic liner, sailing the Antwerp, New York, Southampton route.

On Saturday 15 May she sang again at the Queens Hall in Wigan, fulfilling a promise she had made two years previously that she would return to her home town. The concert was to celebrate the Coronation of King George VI that had taken place three days beforehand. All benefits went towards Mayor Peter Winstanley's Royal Albert Edward Infirmary fund.

In July she was back in Southport for six weeks to stay with her step father in Lethbridge Road. But Margery had to put all her engagements to one side, including a planned trip to the Isle of Man. Instead she spent her time frantically searching for her lost dog, a Terrier named Terry who had been missing for 10 days. She put notices in shop windows, appealed in the newspapers and visited all the police stations in the area.

At Ormskirk police station they told her they had found a dog answering Terry's description and had sent it to Walton dogs home. At Walton she found it had been sold to a Bootle man. At Bootle the buyer said he sold it to a man in the same street. The search ended in the home of the second buyer where Margery was able to buy Terry back.

War Clouds Looming

By 1938 the situation in Europe was deteriorating fast. Germany was now a fascist state with Hitler as Fuhrer having full control of all political and military matters. The country had secretly been rearming for a number of years and war in Europe was now inevitable.

On 12 March German troops marched unopposed into Austria. In what's known as the 'Anschluss', Austria was annexed into Greater Germany.

Hitler next set his eyes on the Sudetenland, the border regions of Czechoslovakia. On the pretext that German speaking Czechs were being victimised he demanded the region be handed to Germany by 1 October.

The leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Italy met in Munich on 29-30 September 1938 and following a policy of appeasement by England and France the Czech President Edvard Benes was

persuaded to submit to Hitler's demands. The next day the Sudetenland was annexed to Germany. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned to England waving a worthless piece of paper declaring 'Peace in our time'.

Six months later on 14 March 1939 Germany invaded the Czech lands and proclaimed the State of Slovakia, moving one step closer to all out war in Europe.

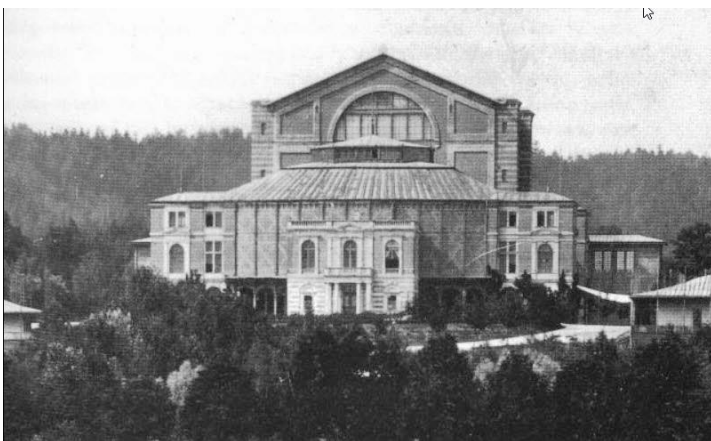
Three weeks later on 7 April Egon departed on a trip to America, sailing on SS Bremen from the northern port of Bremen for the week long voyage to New York.

The ship's passenger list shows that Egon was travelling second class with three other radio reporters, two German and an Argentinian. Their passages were paid for by the German Government. In what seems like a diplomatic trade mission, other passengers sailing courtesy of the government were businessmen and diplomats from Germany, Japan and other various countries.

The War Years

The United Kingdom declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, two days after the German invasion of Poland. Margery, by now a naturalised German citizen living in Berlin with a German husband was in the unenviable position of seeing the country of her birth at war with that of her husband's and her adopted country of residence.

At the time Margery and Egon's home was at Wieland Strasse 10, in the south west of the city in the Charlottenburg district, near Tempelhof Airport.



For the first two years of the war life for the citizens of Germany more or less carried on as normal, with the Germans basking in their military victories. Margery continued singing at the Berlin Opera House and at the Bayreuth Festival. Egon worked as a radio presenter on the Empire Section of Berlin State Radio.

Whilst Margery was living in the heart of Nazi Germany her adopted home town of

Southport was on the receiving end of visits from the Luftwaffe. The little seaside town had been considered a safe haven and was an Evacuation Centre with 15,000 child evacuees, not only from the Liverpool area but from as far as London.

The main target in the north west of England was of course Liverpool, Birkenhead and Bootle Docks and unfortunately Southport was on the flight path to and from Liverpool along the River Mersey. Southport was only 13 miles from Bootle, a few minutes flying time, and Crosby, Ainsdale and Birkdale were also on the receiving end of unused bombs jettisoned by aircraft on their way back to their bases.

The town was to suffer 11 air raids in total over a period of nine months, the first on 4 September 1940. On the eighth raid on 8 April 1941 high explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped in the area quite close to Margery's home in Lethbridge Road.

The vicarage of All Saints church where Margery and Egon had been married was damaged by a blast in the neighbourhood and the Vicar Canon Morris and his wife were slightly injured. In total during the raids on Southport 17 people were killed and 76 injured.

It wasn't until 25 August 1941 that Berlin suffered its first air raid when Tempelhof Airport was targeted by the RAF. After that, air raid precaution instructions were printed in the programmes at the Berlin Opera House.

Margery's stepfather, William Fairhurst died on 13 January 1943. Amid reports that he had disowned Margery completely because of her Nazi connections he was buried in a lone grave in Duke St Cemetery in Southport.

In Berlin in 1943 non essential personnel were evacuated to rural areas after the US Eighth Air Force started bombing the capital. With the Americans bombing by day and the British by night Berlin suffered more and more destruction. By 1944 more than 1.2 million people, 790,000 of them women and children, about a quarter of the city's population, had been evacuated.

The Berlin Opera House was badly damaged in a blaze caused by incendiary bombs during a raid by the RAF in October 1943, targeting the cultural area in the city centre. The raid was ordered by Churchill in retaliation to an attack by the Luftwaffe on Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia a few days previously.

The opera house managed to open again for performances but was finally shut on the orders of Joseph Goebbels the next year. The last performance before closure that Margery would have been involved in was Mozart's 'Le nozza di Figaro' (*The Marriage of Figaro*) on 31 August 1944.

During the war the Bayreuth festival was turned over to the Nazi Party, which continued to sponsor operas for wounded soldiers returning from the front. These soldiers, as 'guests' of the Fuhrer, were forced to attend lectures on Wagner before the performances which continued up to 1944.

The town of Bayreuth was bombed by the USAF in the latter stages of the war and two thirds of the town was destroyed. The home of the Wagner family, 'Wahnfried' was damaged but the Opera House remained unscathed.

The Soldier Spy

Margery's tale is inextricably linked to that of John Brown's and his story has to be told in tandem with hers.

John Henry Owen Brown was born in Battersea, London in 1908. When WW2 started the 31 year old Oxford graduate, nicknamed 'Busty' Brown, was a manager at Truman's Brewery in Burton upon Trent in Staffordshire.

He was also a Territorial soldier serving with 226 Battery, 57th Light Anti Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, based at nearby Lichfield. Promoted to Battery Quartermaster Sergeant, he was sent on a special Senior NCO 's course for instruction on how to gain intelligence once captured and in enemy hands. There he was taught a code that could be used in seemingly innocent letters. Known as the 'HK Code', MI9 had developed it with the help of a Foreign Office expert called Hooker.

Brown was captured near Caestre, approximately 20 miles south east of Dunkirk on 29 May 1940. In a column of 3,000 prisoners he then trekked over 200 miles through France, Belgium and Luxembourg to Trier in Germany. Here he was put in an overcrowded cattle wagon and transported

600 miles to Stalag VIII-B at Lamsdorf in Upper Silesia (*now Lambinowce in modern day Poland*).

Brown decided that he now would become a self made spy. At the start of their captivity prisoners had to use POW postcards to send brief messages home, so he got his first letter home by bribing a Dutch civilian with extra rations in order to pass it to a Swedish sea captain sailing from the North German port of Stettin. The letter was intercepted by the MI9 escape and evasion network, who then got MI6 to write to John on the pretence of being a friend or relative. Brown's letters home were then intercepted and read by MI6 before being forwarded on to his wife Nancy.

At Lamsdorf he reasoned that if he was to gain any information useful to the Allies he would have to get away from the huge Lamsdorf camp which housed 5,000 prisoners. As a BQMS, he was not obliged to work for the Germans, he nevertheless volunteered to go to a work camp (*Arbeitslager*). He was transferred to Arbeits Kommando E/3 at Blechhammer, one of seven POW camps in the area, some 40 miles to the east of Lamsdorf.

At Blechhammer, military POW's of several nations, as well as thousands of Jewish slave labourers who were housed at a nearby sub camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp, worked on two huge construction sites two miles apart. These would eventually become chemical plants using bituminous coal to produce synthetic oil. The prisoners at E/3 worked on Blechhammer North, their back breaking work consisted of clearing a forest site of tree stumps and stones and making access roads.

Brown decided early on that the best way to gain intelligence was to appear sympathetic to the German cause and get them to trust him. Striking up a good relationship with the Commandant of Blechhammer, Prince Waldemar Zu Hohenlohe-Ohringen was his first task.

Next he wrote an article in the POW weekly propaganda newspaper 'The Camp' which was published in Berlin by the Germans on 7 Sept 1941 and distributed all over Germany. In it he praised the German authorities for providing all the necessities needed for prison camp life.

He knew that the Germans would notice his comments in the article and link it with the fact that before the war he had been in the British Union of Fascists, for which they had a list of members. At the same time he also knew it would make his fellow prisoners distrust him and even loathe him as a Nazi sympathiser.

Brown's plan worked, in March 1942 he was escorted to Stalag III-D in south west Berlin for assessment by the Germans. One day he was taken to a house in Steglitz that was being used as a holding centre for special prisoners. It was the prototype of a special camp the Germans were planning.

At the house he was interviewed by none other than William Joyce, the traitor who broadcast anti British propaganda on Berlin Radio. Joyce began his daily broadcasts with the words 'This is Germany calling. This is Germany calling' in an affected upper class English accent. The British public soon nicknamed him 'Lord Haw Haw'. Brown had actually met Joyce before the war in the Fascist HQ Club in Kensington Road, Chelsea but did not disclose this to Joyce who did not recognise him.

Over the next few weeks Brown was allowed to go on walks round the city with a guard and he used the opportunity to do reconnaissance on potential targets and even managed to get close to Tempelhof Airport. However, William Joyce took a dislike to Brown and gave him a negative report. Major Heimpel of the Abwehr also did not trust him, so he was sent back to Stalag VIII-B at Lamsdorf. It wasn't until August 1942 that he was able to get back to Arbeitskommando E/3 at Blechhammer.

In his letters home he passed on the locations of AA defences, barracks and camouflaged sites in Berlin and the purpose of the construction work going on at Blechhammer. Known to Allied bomber crews as 'Black Hammer' the site was first bombed by the 15th US Army Air Force on 30 October 1943. Despite several bombing raids, production of synthetic oil eventually began at Blechhammer on 1 April 1944.

In March 1943 a message from London told Brown to try and arrange a transfer back to Berlin and obtain details of Englishmen broadcasting propaganda for Germany. After a carefully orchestrated row with the senior British NCO's at Blechhammer he persuaded the Commandant to transfer him back to Stalag III-D in Berlin, arriving on 12 June 1943.

Two new further sub-camps were created in May to June 1943, coinciding with Brown's transfer to Berlin. Stalag III-D/999 for officers in the Zehlendorf West district and Stalag III- D/517 for other ranks at Genshagen in the Ludwigsfelde district in the south west of the city. The Germans planned to use these special detachments to separate potential collaborators from other British POWs. Prisoners of war were selected at random to go to these special camps for six week's rest, the Germans particularly sought out former members and sympathizers of the British Union of Fascists. They soon become known to the POWs as "holiday camps", a chance to get away from the poor rations and hard work in the coal mines, quarries and factories for a while. They offered better rations and living conditions, a concert hall, a library and a steady diet of propaganda.

Brown was appointed by Dr. Arnold Hillen Zeigfeld of the German Foreign Office to be senior British NCO in charge of administration at Special Detachment 517 based at Genshagen. A former Hitler Youth Camp, it had no watch towers and although it was surrounded by barbed wire, hedges and trees planted on the inside perimeter gave the illusion of an open camp.

The camp which could house a maximum of 270 men, came under the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry and Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda. Camp security was run by the Abwehr, the German Military Intelligence, responsible for espionage, counter intelligence and sabotage. The guards, all English speakers so that they could eavesdrop, just carried holstered pistols instead of rifles, in an attempt to seem less threatening.

As Vertrauensmann (*man of confidence*) Brown quickly made himself at home, he hand picked a staff who he could trust to help him run the camp, some of whom were sent from Blechhammer. He organised a black market to procure luxuries for the camp inmates and smuggled a radio receiver in so that he was aware of the course of the war.

The first batch of 200 'holidaymakers' came to Genshagen and Brown ensured that they were looked after and got a well earned rest away from normal POW camp life and work details.

Importantly, he discovered the purpose of the holiday camps was to recruit POW's into the British Free Corps (*Britisches Freikorps*), a small unit of the Waffen SS raised to fight in the east against Bolshevism. Brown made it his mission to ensure that the attempt to form the BFC would fail.

Throughout all this time, while being distrusted by the British P.O.W.s, Brown was gaining evidence of Englishmen broadcasting for the Germans and also reporting to London by coded letters giving details of potential targets for bomber attacks.

A Patriotic Ally

In an effort to show that German culture was superior to that of the Allies they brought in famous artistes to entertain the troops in the camp theatre. These included singers, pianists, violinists and dancers, Brown even arranged for the POW band and actors from Blechhammer to be brought to Berlin to perform the Mikado, the comic opera by Gilbert & Sullivan.

As British SNCO in charge Brown always met the entertainers beforehand. One day he was introduced to a singer by the name of Frau Strohm, during his conversation with her he realised that she was the famous English opera singer from Wigan, Margery Booth.

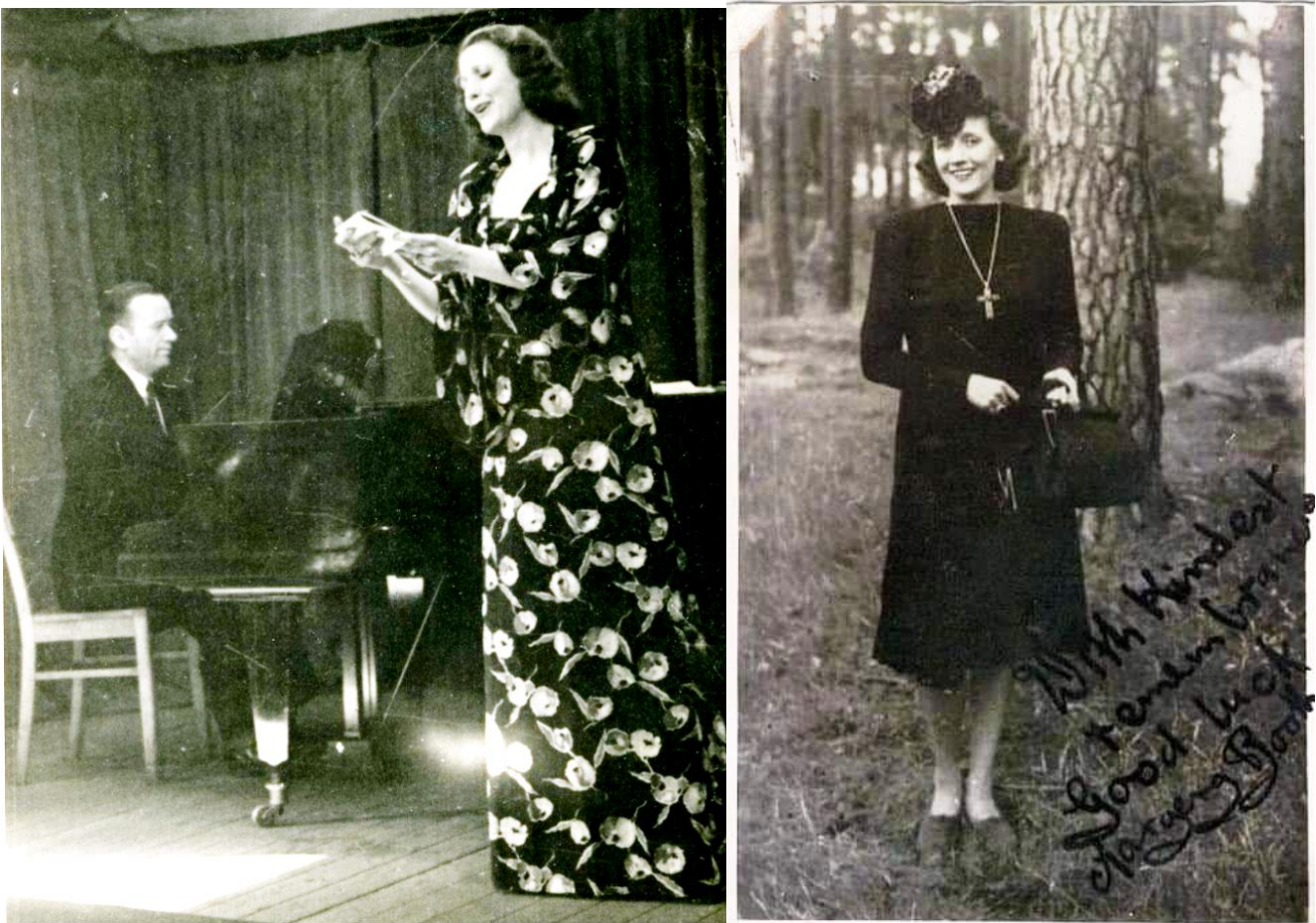
It is reported that she started her concerts with the greeting:

"Hello, I'm Margery Booth from Wigan".

John Brown doesn't actually confirm this but does say that she sang patriotic songs, finishing off with Land of Hope and Glory, much to the annoyance of the Germans. However Margery moved in high circles and she had been given personal assurance by Hitler and Goebbels that they would deal with the matter personally if she was insulted because of her British birth.

In a later interview in the Liverpool Echo in 1946 Margery said:

"I carried on singing but was never pro German. I sang for two hours every fortnight to the POW's"



A photograph has survived of her performing on stage at Genshagen, she is wearing a full length dress with poppy motifs, a point not lost on Brown. Realising where her loyalties lay he struck up a friendship and in his memoirs he says;

"I was extremely moved the first time I heard her sing but I did not know then I was to have to trust her implicitly".

For the next 18 months Margery helped Brown in his intelligence gathering mission. She was in contact with top officials of the Nazi Party and Diplomats and was in an ideal position to gain important information. She took considerable risks, and if her activities had been uncovered she would have faced certain death.

Barney Roberts, a Tasmanian who was at Genshagen for a 'holiday', met Brown who showed him his room. On the wall was a signed photograph of a famous opera singer. Roberts thought it was the opera singer Elisabeth Schwartzkopf but it was almost certainly a photo of Margery Booth as Brown told him it was a personal gift from a wonderful lady.

It is not known to what extent he was complicit but with Egon working at Berlin State Radio he was perfectly placed to supply information to Margery on foreigners broadcasting propaganda for the Germans.

Brown received a message from London asking him to verify the identity of Englishman John Amery who was broadcasting propaganda from Berlin and whose idea it was to form the British Free Corps.

To do this Brown needed to get out of Genshagen and into the city, so persuaded the Germans to issue a special identity card (*Ausweis*) which allowed him out of camp unaccompanied. He bought a smart suit, but not to antagonise his fellow prisoners further he left the camp in uniform and changed clothes in a field.

Through a member of the BFC, Thomas Bottcher (real name Thomas Cooper), Brown set up a meeting with Amery at the Hotel Adlon, situated in the city centre opposite the Brandenburg Gate. While seeming sympathetic to his cause, he managed to get Amery to talk about his activities and reveal his identity.

Now with the freedom of the city, Brown was able to rendezvous with Margery outside of the camp. He visited her flat and they would meet up at the Berlin Opera House and also the Cafe Vaterland, a nightclub in Potsdamer Platz in central Berlin.

The Cafe, the largest in the world, was inside the enormous Haus Vaterland (*House of the Fatherland*), a themed pleasure palace based on the Coney Island entertainment area in New York. It contained a cinema, numerous themed restaurants and ballrooms and could accommodate 8,000 people. It was badly damaged, along with the Berlin Opera House in the bombing raid on 22 Nov 1943 that destroyed much of the city centre.

It was in the Cafe Vaterland that Brown met a German girl by the name of Gisele Maluche, who was to become his mistress. Her flat was a useful base to have in the city from which to carry on his dangerous game of espionage.

Espionage and Arrest

After the first batch of 'holidaymakers' had left Genshagen the camp was badly damaged in an air raid. Brown had told London of a factory a mile away, that was producing engines primarily for the Messerschmitt 109 fighter. The plant was bombed but stray bombs fell on the camp as well. The permanent staff were sent to temporary accommodation while repairs were carried out.

In the Autumn of 1944 Brown was arrested and confronted by Major Heimpel of the Abwehr and two members of the Gestapo, with a statement from a traitor giving details of his espionage activities. Brown denied everything and blamed it on some of the Jewish inmates, saying they were out to destroy the idea of a British Free Corps. With reservations the Germans believed him and

released him, but Brown now knew that his time was running out.

With the Gestapo now suspicious of him. Brown passed over a package containing twelve secret documents to Margery for safekeeping, these included a list of names of Allied soldiers who had defected and joined the BFC. She said in a later interview that she never let the papers out of her sight and during her performances she hid them in her underclothing. This led to her being called the 'Knicker Spy' by some after the war.

During the war, Crown Prince Wilhem who had befriended Margery at Bayreuth, lived at Schloss Cecilienhof in Potsdam, 17 miles to the south west of Berlin. After the failed assassination plot on Hitler on 20 July 1944 the Gestapo had the Prince put under surveillance. Despite this Margery managed to bury the documents given to her by Brown in the grounds of his palace at Potsdam.

In Oct 1944 Hitler passed over the responsibility of the POW camps to Himmler's SS. Unaware of the 'holiday camps' up to then they started an investigation into the activities at Genshagen. In December the camp was shut down and Brown and his staff were arrested by the Gestapo. They wanted to know why there were so many well targeted bombing raids at strategic locations around the camp and why the recruitment into the British Free Corps had been such a failure.

This of course was thanks to the efforts of Brown and his staff who had dissuaded British and Dominion troops from going over to the German side. Never more than about 60 men belonged to the BFC at one time or another and at no time did it reach more than 30 in strength. A small number of men also joined the staff of the Ministry of Propaganda, working for radio stations and magazines. Brown and his staff were kept in a Strafe (*punishment*) prison for three weeks under interrogation, before being returned along with four others to Lamsdorf (*now designated Stalag 344*) in January 1945.

The Great March West

Brown arrived back in Lamsdorf just in time for the 'Great March West'. With the Russians fast approaching from the east Hitler ordered all the POW camps to be emptied to prevent them being liberated. The prisoners were then forced to march hundreds of miles back into Germany.

There were three main routes, the prisoners at Lamsdorf would follow the central route which started at Stalag Luft VII at Bankau near Kreuzberg in Silesia via Stalag 344 at Lamsdorf. Then to Stalag VIII-A at Gorlitz where they were allowed a week's rest, before ending at Stalag IX-B at Bad Orb in Germany, approximately 30 miles north east of Frankfurt.

The evacuation started on 22 January, in blizzards and temperatures of minus 20 degrees most of the POWs were ill-prepared for the march, having suffered years of poor rations and wearing clothing ill-suited to the appalling winter conditions.

Many hundreds did not survive the death march, succumbing to hypothermia, disease, ill treatment by the guards and from air attacks when Russian aircraft strafed the columns of marching men mistaking them for retreating German soldiers. The long trek ended 57 days and 550 miles later on 19 March at Stalag IX-B at Bad Orb.

On 2 April 1945 an American task force broke through the German lines, and drove north over 37 miles through enemy held territory to Bad Orb. The camp was liberated when a tank belonging to the 2nd Bn, 114th Regt, 44 Inf Div smashed down the main gates.

Unbeknown to Brown the Gestapo had sent a message, personally signed by Himmler, to all POW camps telling them to be on the lookout for Brown. He found out he was a wanted man at one of the camps they passed through. On the second day knowing that eventually there would be a photo I.D check, he and one of his staff from Genshagen, Jimmy Newcombe, absconded during an air raid that had dispersed the column and made their own way west.

They eventually made contact with US Army forces, however, once back with British forces Brown was arrested and found himself facing a charge of aiding the enemy. Word of his secret work for the Allies soon came from London and he was returned home for debriefing.



Whilst Brown was on the long march west, he was unaware that because of his association with Margery she had been arrested at her flat in Berlin. She was taken to the Gestapo headquarters in Prinz-Albrecht Strasse and held for three days under intense interrogation. She denied any involvement with Brown's activities and with her captors unable to prove a case against her she was released.

In March 1945, Margery and Gisele Maluche, Brown's girlfriend, fled during an air raid and made their way south to Bavaria to await the arrival of American troops. They had escaped just in time, by 14 April the Russians had encircled Berlin. By the time the city fell over three quarters of it had been destroyed by Allied bombing and Russian artillery fire.

Finally In May 1945, with hostilities over, Margery was processed by Allied Forces and flown back to England in a military aircraft.

The Aftermath in Germany

In Wieland Strasse today, the street that Margery and Egon lived in, are grim reminders of the dark days of the war. Outside eleven of the houses are 'Stolpersteine' (*stumbling blocks*), concrete blocks measuring 10cm x 10cm which are laid into the pavement in front of the last voluntarily chosen place of residence of the victims of the Nazis. Their names and fate are engraved into a brass plate on the top of each Stolpersteine.

A total of 57 Jewish residents of Wieland Strasse who were murdered in the holocaust are commemorated today. A next door neighbour of Margery and Egon's at number 8 was Dr. Julius Grunthal. He moved to Holland to escape persecution, but when that country too was invaded he was eventually rounded up and deported to the extermination camp at Sobibor in Poland, where he was murdered on 16 April 1943, aged 68.

Sometime during the latter stages of the war Margery and Egon separated and their marriage was later dissolved. Egon Strohm continued to live in Berlin after the war, earning a living as a radio presenter and commentator on art, literature and music. He also became a writer and part time actor.

In 1946 he wrote a semi-autobiographical novel entitled 'Schmerzvoll Reise' (*Painful Journey*), which was loosely based on his own life with Margery:

'Christian Messmer is presented as a student of economics who resides in a lodging house in Berlin

here he meets a young English music student by the name of Anne Willoughby. He lives on his father's money, gets involved in romances and does not know exactly what he wants in life.

Then his father loses his business and property. Deprived of financial help Christian subsists on tutoring and appearing as a bar pianist.

With Anne's help, he decides to go to London as a teacher. However after spending all his money on drink he goes on a journey around the country, gets by with odd jobs, and finally finds shelter with the Bottlethorpe working-class family.

Lewis Maxwell, a trades union representative, gets Christian a job collecting union membership payments. Then after discovering Christian's real talent of writing, Lewis Maxwell reveals himself to be the son of the Cuthford-Grisby family, who own the majority of shares in a newspaper company.

Christian has finally found his calling, after publishing his first article he is commissioned to write an Encyclopedia on Employment and the Trade Union movement.

Meanwhile Anne Willoughby has become a famous pianist. When he discovers she is travelling to England for a concert he decides to contact her again. The pair admit to having waited for each other, romance blossoms and they get engaged to be married.

However the story ends in tragedy in 1935 when Anne has a fatal accident on the train journey back to Europe. A grief stricken Christian then returns to Germany to his parents home'.

On 14 March 1948, Egon, along with eight others from Germany and Austria boarded an American Airways flight in Frankfurt and flew to New York, courtesy of the Washington Court of Justice. They were required to testify in a treason trial against Robert Henry Best.

The party was met in New York by a federal agent and a policeman and taken by train to Boston where the accused was on trial. Best had been an American correspondent who covered events in Europe during the interwar period, living in Vienna for 20 years. He was charged with 12 acts of treason by broadcasting propaganda on Berlin State Radio to the USA Zone. He was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Best served his sentence at the Federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut. On August 12, 1951, he was later transferred to the Medical Centre for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Missouri. Best died there of a brain haemorrhage on 16 December 1952.

In 1953 Egon acted in the successful film 'Martin Luther', which had been made in Germany. In it he played the part of Cardinal Alexander, the special emissary to Pope Leo the Tenth.

In 1960 he appeared in the film 'Man on a String', a spy thriller made in Berlin starring Ernest Borgnine where he had an uncredited role playing a hotel concierge.

After writing four radio plays Egon then became a literary translator, creating German language versions of numerous best selling books, including 'Watership Down' by Richard Adams. Egon Strohm died in Berlin on 2 May 1983 aged 78.

After the collapse of the Third Reich a denazification court banned Winifred Wagner from the administration of the Bayreuth Festival and its assets. The responsibility of managing the Festspielhaus was passed to her sons Wieland and Wolfgang. During American occupation of the region after WWII, the theatre was used for recreation and religious services for American troops. Only popular concerts and mixed entertainment were allowed.

Eventually it was returned to the city of Bayreuth in 1951 and the Wagner Festival resumed. Winifred Wagner died in 1980 aged 82 in Uberlingen, Germany. Today the Festival is still as popular as ever and draws thousands of Wagner fans to Bayreuth every summer.

The commandant of Blechhammer POW camp, Prince Zu Hohenlohe-Ohringen, related to the British Royal family through HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was accused of being too lenient with his prisoners. He was posted to Italy where he was captured by the British. After the war he kept in contact with John Brown and other POW's by letter and was invited to reunions in England. He died in 1965 aged 74.

The Treason Trials

John Brown was a witness in 20 treason trials including that of Walter Purdy, the man who betrayed him at Genshagen. It would have cost Brown his life if the Germans had believed his story that Brown was a spy. Margery would have been implicated as well with dire consequences.

Before the war Purdy, who had been an active member of the Fascist Party became a Merchant Navy officer. When hostilities started he was transferred to an armed merchant vessel, HMS Vandyke as ship's engineer. On 10 June 1940 the Vandyke was bombed and sunk off Narvik in Norway. After 36 hours in a lifeboat he was captured and became a POW.

In 1943 whilst in Marlag-Milag Nord POW camp near Bremen he decided to defect and work for the Germans. They used him by sending him to different camps, including Colditz Castle, to spy on his fellow POW's under the assumed name of Bob Poynter. He heard about Brown's activities from another prisoner and betrayed him to the Germans.

At the Old Bailey Purdy was initially sentenced to death but this was commuted to a life sentence. After being released on parole in 1954, he led a quiet life away from the limelight in Essex.

In December 1945, Margery and John Brown were key witnesses in the treason trials of John Amery and William Joyce at the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court in London.

Margery had met both Amery and Joyce in Berlin and could vouch for Brown's evidence.

John Amery was the son of Leo Amery, the Secretary of State for India in Winston Churchill's wartime Cabinet. Coming from a privileged background he was sent to Harrow to be educated but proved to be a rebel and left after a year.

Amery turned out to be an eccentric playboy who carried his teddy bear everywhere with him. He had a love of fast cars and fast women and at one point had picked up 74 motoring offences.

He tried a career in film production, setting up a number of companies, these ultimately failed leading to his bankruptcy in 1936.

Amery who was an ardent Fascist with a hatred of Jews and Communists then went to live in France with his girlfriend. His fascist views led to him getting involved with the Spanish Civil War and becoming a gun smuggler for General Franco.

He remained in France after the German invasion in 1940, living in the unoccupied zone run by the Vichy Government. In September 1942, Amery obtained a permit to visit Berlin and consulted with the German English Committee, a body set up to seek out fascist sympathisers among the British.

Amery suggested the Germans should form a British anti-communist legion, one whose members would be native born Britons with right wing views and fascist sympathies. He called it 'The British Legion of St George'.

Hitler was greatly impressed by the articulate Amery and his ideas, even giving his permission for him to remain in Germany as a personal guest.

In 1943 Amery started to recruit for a unit aimed at employing 50 to 100 British men for propaganda purposes. He considered that a prime source for such recruitment would be among disillusioned inmates of the POW camps in Germany. However the Germans sidelined him and called the proposed new unit the British Free Corps, belonging to the Waffen SS.

Amery continued to broadcast from Berlin until late 1944, he then travelled to Northern Italy to support Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, who had been ousted from power the previous year.

On 25 April 1945, Amery was captured along with his French mistress Michelle Thomas by Italian partisans from the Garibaldi Brigade, near Como. Amery and Thomas were initially set for execution, but both of them were eventually sent to Milan.

It was at this point that a young Captain, Alan Whicker, then with the British Army Film Unit (*later to become one of the most famous faces of television with Whicker's World*), heard that Amery was being kept in a Milan jail. Sensing a scoop, Whicker, a trained journalist, appealed on Radio Milan for Amery's whereabouts. Within minutes, partisans made arrangements for Amery to be handed over to him.

At his trial Amery pleaded guilty to eight charges of treason, a move that inevitably meant he faced the death penalty. The entire hearing lasted only eight minutes.

His story came to its dramatic end on the gallows at exactly a minute past nine on 18 December 1945, when hangman Albert Pierrepoint dispatched traitor John Amery to his fate.

William Brook Joyce was born in 1906 in Brooklyn, New York. He was the son of an Irish Catholic father from County Mayo and an English mother who had been born in Oldham, Lancashire. When William was three the family returned to live in Ireland.

On 22 Oct 1924, whilst stewarding a Tory meeting in London he was attacked by a woman who slashed him with a razor on his right cheek, leaving a deep prominent scar from his ear to the corner of his mouth.

In 1932 Joyce joined the British Union of Fascists under Sir Oswald Mosley, and swiftly became a leading speaker, praised for the power of his oratory. Appalled however, by the violence of Moseley's Blackshirts he left and started up a breakaway organisation, the Socialist League.

In late August 1939, shortly before war was declared, Joyce and his wife Margaret fled to Germany. Joyce had been tipped off that the British authorities intended to detain him under Defence Regulation 18B. This regulation allowed internment without trial of people suspected of being actively opposed to the ongoing war with Germany.

Allying himself to the Nazi cause, he became a naturalised German citizen in 1940. Throughout the war Joyce broadcast anti British propaganda from Berlin. His last broadcast was on 30 April 1945 during the Battle of Berlin.

On 28 May 1945, Joyce was captured by British forces at Flensburg, near the German border with Denmark. Spotting a dishevelled figure while resting from gathering firewood, a group of intelligence soldiers from a special unit named T- Force engaged him in conversation in French and English.

One of the soldiers was a German Jew, Horst Pinschewer, born in Berlin. He had been evacuated to Buxton in Derbyshire before the war, changed his name to Geoffrey Howard Perry and joined the British Army. After they asked whether he was Joyce, Perry recognised his voice and asked him 'You wouldn't be William Joyce would you?'. Joyce then reached into his trouser pocket for his false passport. Believing he was armed, Perry shot him four times through the buttocks.

Two intelligence officers then drove him to a border post and handed him to British military police where he received medical attention before being flown back to England. Joyce was tried at the Old Bailey on three counts of high treason. He was found guilty and hanged, aged 39, by Albert Pierrepoint on 3 January 1946 at Wandsworth Prison.

As was customary for executed criminals, Amery's and Joyce's remains were buried in unmarked graves within the walls of HMP Wandsworth.

In 1976 following a campaign by his daughter, Heather Landalo, William Joyce's remains were re-interred in Bohermore, County Galway in Ireland where he had lived with his family from 1909 until 1922.

In 1996 Julian Amery had his brother's remains exhumed and cremated, scattering his ashes in France.

By coincidence Albert Pierrepoint and his wife Annie retired to Margery's home town of Southport in the 1960's. Albert spent the last four years of his life in a nursing home, just a couple of miles from Margery's old home in Lethbridge Road, where he died in July 1992, aged 87.

For his exploits and bravery during the war John Brown was deservedly awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (*second only to the Victoria Cross for gallantry*), on 25 September 1945.

He later became a businessman in Newcastle before moving to Dorset where he became landlord of the Victoria Hotel, in Cranborne, Dorset. He died there in September 1965 at the age of 56.

Margery's case was a lot more complicated as her reputation had preceded her. She had married a German, lived in Germany for a long time before and during the war and had taken up German citizenship. It was well known that she had met Hitler, and the top Nazis and that the Fuhrer was an admirer of her talents.

Nevertheless, she was badly let down by the British Government who failed to put the record straight. All she got in thanks was the return of her British Nationality, this was part in thanks to John Brown who personally submitted a statement in support of her to the Government.

An entry in the London Gazette dated 22 Aug 1947 confirms that Margery had been readmitted as a British subject as from 30 June of that year. At the time she was living at 17 Manchester Road, Southport, a large detached house a few hundred yards from the town's Marine Lake.

There are no records of Margery performing professionally again, the days of singing at the grand opera houses at the Covent Garden, Bayreuth and Berlin were over.

An article in the Formby Times describes Margery making her first post war appearance in a concert in aid of seamen's charities at the Hippodrome in Formby, near Southport on 17 November 1946

A Post War Romance

After escaping Berlin, Margery was to meet and have a romance with a Jewish American Army Sgt by the name of Eugene Ladislav Kallus. An advocate lawyer by occupation, he was born 18 Dec 1905 in Rosvegovo in Czechoslovakia.

The day after German troops marched into Prague, Hungarian forces occupied and annexed the Podkarpatska region of eastern Czechoslovakia where Eugene was living in the small town of Tacovo, near the Romanian border. (*now in the Ukraine and known as Tyachiv*).

Eugene's country had now ceased to exist, wisely he decided to emigrate to America where a relative of his lived. He arrived in New York from Hamburg aboard SS New York on 8 May 1939 and joined his Uncle, Max Bergman and Aunt Sarah in Brooklyn.

Eugene enlisted in the US Army on 2 Oct 1942 at Fort Jay, Governors Island, New York. And issued the service number of 32518668. On 7 May 1943, exactly four years after entering the USA he was granted Naturalisation as a US citizen whilst serving as a Cpl with Bty A, 197th Field Artillery Battalion at Camp Blanding, Jacksonville, Florida. Shortly after, the unit was disbanded and the men dispersed to new Regiments.

He was discharged from the army on 19 Oct 1945 and sailed home to New York from the French Port of Le Havre on 9 December aboard the troopship USS Gustavus Victory.

The UK Incoming Passenger Lists show that on 13 Sept 1946 Eugene arrived in London on the USS Ferdinando Gorges. His destination address was Margery's home at Manchester Rd in Southport.

Surprisingly however, the next year on 29 April Eugene then married a Czech lady by the name of Rose Havas in Prague. Rose was a widow with an 18 year old son, they were both Holocaust survivors.

Rose was born in 1904 in Kajdano, Hungary (*now in the Ukraine and known as Kajdanovo*). On 18 May 1944, the day that the Germans arrived in their home town to transport the Jews to the Auschwitz Extermination Camp, her father David Moskovics died of a heart attack. Her mother Fani died in Auschwitz shortly after arriving.

Rose, (*Prisoner No. 51007*) was transferred from Auschwitz to Buchenwald Concentration Camp on 4 Oct 1944, then moved to a sub camp to be used as slave labour. She was then transferred to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp in March 1945 where she was liberated by British troops a month later.

Her husband Dr. Leo Havas died in Auschwitz 10 October 1944 during a Sonderkommando uprising. After learning they were going to be killed the next day, workers at Crematorium No.4 attacked their SS guards. Some Germans were killed but over 250 prisoners died in the fighting and a further 200 were executed after the rebellion was suppressed.

Her sons, Robert and George were transferred from Auschwitz on 26 May 1944 to Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria. Robert died there aged 11 on 2 Dec 1944. George was liberated, aged 16 when the US 80th Inf Div overran Ebensee, a subcamp of Mauthausen on 6 May 1945.

In hindsight it looks as though it was probably an arranged marriage of convenience between Eugene and Rose in order to give her and her son the chance of a new life in America.

On 27 March 1948, Rose petitioned for divorce from Eugene in Garland, Arkansas on the grounds

of indignities. At the time Eugene was in England with Margery, four days later on the 31st he departed London to New York on BOAC Flight No.1/27. His destination address is shown as 260 West 78th St, in Manhattan.

Exactly a month later on 27 April, after a year of marriage the Decree Absolute was granted. Rose Kallus, who became an American citizen on 3 April 1951 died 11 March 2005 in Babylon, Suffolk County, New York aged 100.

After the war Margery, her close family all gone, shunned by her friends and peers because of her Nazi connections and unable to revive her singing career, commuted between Southport, London and New York.

In Nov 1947 she sailed from Southampton on the Queen Mary, arriving in New York on 25 November. The ship's records show that her last residence had been 63 Princes Square, Notting Hill, in London. She is described as being a single woman, five feet ten inches tall, with auburn hair and blue eyes.

Margery's contact in America, described as a friend, was Gizi Edlis, (*aka Gizela Kallus Edlis*), Eugene's sister. Born in 1897, she married Heinrich Edlis in 1921 in her home town of Rosvegovo before settling in the Austrian capital of Vienna. They lived in Schonbrunner Strasse in the south west suburbs of the city where they had three children, Klothilde born in 1922, Stefan Theodore in 1925 and Herbert Ernst in 1927.

Heinrich died after a short illness in Vienna on 18 April 1938 aged 44, a month after the Austrian Anschluss. The campaign against the Austrian Jews had begun immediately, with the Nazis dissolving Jewish organisations, institutions and schools, hoping to force Jews to emigrate. Their plans succeeded, by October 1941, when Jews were eventually banned from immigrating by Himmler, 130,000 Jews had already left Vienna, 30,000 of whom went to the United States.

Gizela and her three children were among the ones who emigrated to America. They left behind all of their property, but were forced to pay the Reich Flight Tax, a tax on all émigrés from Nazi Germany. This was set at 96% and was just a form of legalised theft to confiscate Jewish assets.

With the help of her late husband's cousin, Jerome Edlis, a businessman from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the Jewish Transmigration Bureau they escaped Vienna in March 1941.

They sailed from Lisbon in Portugal a month later aboard the SS Nyassa. Gizela had \$50 to her name when they arrived in New York on the 25 April. Stefan later recalled that his uncle Eugene was waiting on the Pier with sandwiches for them.

Austria's loss was to become America's gain, as all of Gizi's children were to become highly successful in their chosen careers. Klothilde, now known as Lotte, became a noted scholar, publishing four books and numerous scholarly papers. She studied at Stanford University in California and at Oxford University where she became a Doctor of Philosophy. In 1959 she married radio engineer Hans Motz, also born in Vienna but now a British subject. He was to become the first Professor of Engineering at Oxford University. Lotte died in Oxford in 1997, aged 75.

Two years after arriving in New York Stefan was drafted into the US Navy, serving on the island of Iwo Jima for six months where he spent the time looking for and burying the bodies of Japanese soldiers. After the war, he stayed on the West Coast in San Francisco, which had a bustling plastics industry and by 1965 he had founded the Apollo Plastics Corporation in Chicago, which made him a fortune. He ploughed his money into collecting pop art worth millions of dollars. He and his wife Gael Neeson became well known philanthropists, donating works of art to Chicago's Art Institute

worth nearly half a billion dollars. Stefan died in Chicago in 2019, aged 94.

The youngest of the siblings, Herbert, graduated from Queens College and later the Albert Einstein School of Medicine at the Yeshiva University. Specialising in Oncology and Haematology, he worked at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in the Bronx, New York for 45 years. Herbert passed away in October 2020 aged 82.

The UK & Ireland Outward Passenger lists show that Margery made two more trips to New York. Firstly departing Liverpool on 11 Aug 1949 on SS Britannic. She then made her final voyage on 31 March 1951, again from Liverpool aboard SS Franconia.

The ship's manifest notes her occupation as singer and that she was travelling with 12 pieces of luggage. Her last address was 'The Gables' in Hoghton Street, Southport, the home of her close friend Dorothy Martland who had lived in Wigan and was now married to a prominent local dental surgeon.

Margery's destination address in America was Gizi's Edlis's house at 3819-52nd St, Long Island City, a seven bedroom property in the leafy suburb of Woodside. Her new life in America though was to be cruelly cut short..



Margery died, reportedly of cancer, in the Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, New York on 11 April 1952, aged 46. The hospital records show her death recorded twice, one entry as Margery Booth, the other as Margery Kallus, but both with the same reference number.

On 29 April 1969, sixteen years after her untimely death, Margery's cremated remains were interred under the name of Margery Booth Kallus, in Unit 8 of the Ferncliff Mausoleum at Ferncliff Cemetery

in Hartsdale, New York.

Eugene Kallus died on 30 July 1991 aged 85 at Sunnyside, Staten Island, he was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery, Kew Gardens, in Queens County, New York.



Margery Myers Booth, the girl from Wigan, who had rubbed shoulders with the rich and famous and some of the most notorious characters of the 20th century is one of the forgotten heroines of the Second World War. She has slipped into history, without recognition, and with her story untold.

Postscript

In 2011 interest in Margery was aroused with the sale by auction of John Brown's medals and war time memorabilia. These included photographs of Genshagen POW camp, amongst them some of Margery, letters from Prince Zu Lohenlohe-Ohringen, the Commandant of Blechhammer and a copy of Brown's statement to the government urging them to reinstate Margery's British citizenship.

Inspired by John Brown's book and intrigued by her involvement, British born writer Prince Frederick von Saxe-Lauenberg persuaded his friend, actor and screenwriter Ralph Harvey (*real name Count Sir Ralph de Straet Von Kollman*) to write a screenplay for a film of Margery's life. It was to be called 'The Knicker Spy'.

In December 2011 the Wigan Observer ran an article on the subject indicating that filming would be starting the following year and would be premiered in 2013, but the film never materialised.

In 2016 the idea was resurrected, Ralph Harvey, who was involved in the research and screenplay for the first film attempt in 2012, wrote a second screenplay entitled 'The Spy in the Eagles Nest'. It was published as an 117 page paperback on 8 October 2017 and is also available on Kindle.

Reading the synopsis of the film shows that Ralph used artistic licence to good effect, mixing fact with fiction. Inevitably Margery is portrayed as the poor little mill worker from the back streets of Wigan, whose father dies and her mother is forced to take in a lodger to help pay the bills, which of course couldn't be further from the truth.

To be produced by an independent company, Imperial Film Productions, the film went into pre-production in 2017. Anna Friel was cast to play Margery with opera singer Leslie Garret providing the operatic voice overs, other well known names in the cast were Stephen Fry as Reich Marshal Herman Goering and Susan George as Margery's mother, Florence. Ralph Harvey died in 2017 before the project on Margery could be completed and again the film was never released.

On 9 Jan 2017 Akushi Promotions announced that a short 15 minute documentary was to be made on Margery's life. They released a 1 min 5 sec trailer video on youtube entitled 'Margery Booth-The Forgotten Poppy'. Later in the same year they announced that research was ongoing for a longer documentary and released a 2 min 53 secs trailer entitled 'Margery Booth-The Spy who Sang For Hitler' but to date both documentaries have not yet been released.

However the project has not yet been abandoned. Still with the same title 'The Spy in the Eagles Nest' and original cast, executive director and screenwriter Franz von Habsburg- Toskana who writes under the pseudonyms of Frank Tuscany and Mark Denton has written another script. It is also planned to introduce a big name American actor to play in the film.

On 9 Aug 1990 the Guardian newspaper reported that the then Mayor of Wigan, Councillor Ronald McAllister J.P had written to the Government Cabinet Office nominating Margery for a posthumous award such as the George Cross or George Medal. His efforts proved to be unsuccessful.

The UK honours system is complicated with strict rules and criteria. There is a limit on the number of recipients of an award or honour that can be made annually and some honours cannot be awarded posthumously or made to foreign nationals.

Margery's case is further complicated by the fact that she was a German Citizen at the time of her

exploits during the war.

I have since been in contact with the Honours Secretariat in the Cabinet Office to clarify the situation.

Margery fills the criteria for the award of the George Medal apart from one important point. Unfortunately all posthumous nominations have to be made within five years of the recipients death. This rule is strictly adhered to, without exception, so any attempt at a second nomination is doomed to failure and Margery will not be honoured by her country.

In Jan 2021, Tommie Harte, a young student at Myerscough College who founded the 'Notre Society' started a campaign to have Margery recognised in some form by her home town. He approached Wigan Council's Blue Plaque Committee, who have accepted his nomination and are reviewing the case.

Graham Taylor

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Abbreviations

AA	Anti Aircraft
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BFC	British Free Corps
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation
BQMS	Battery Quarter Master Sergeant
BUF	British Union of Fascists
Capt	Captain
CE	Church of England
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
Dept	Department
HMP	His Majesties Prison
HQ	Headquarters
Jnr	Junior
JP	Justice of the Peace
MI6	Military Intelligence Section Six

MI9	Military Intelligence Section Nine
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
POW	Prisoner of War
Snr NCO	Senior Non Commissioned Officer SS Schutzstaffell
USAF	United States Air Force

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