

Ettie Steinberg

Ettie Steinberg and her son Leon were the only Irish citizens to die in Auschwitz – their story



Photograph courtesy Conan Kennedy

The Steinberg family in Dublin. Left to right: Ettie, Fanny (Faige), Jack (Yankel) and his twin sister Rosie. Their parents Aaron and Bertha sit in the centre; on the floor are Bessie and Joshua Solomon (Solly). Another brother, Louis, is absent from the photo

Ettie Steinberg's story begins in the former Czechoslovakia. The town of Veretski (Vericky) was the original home of her parents, Aaron Hirsch Steinberg and Bertha Roth. One of seven children, their daughter Esther, known as Ettie, was born there on 11 January 1914.

Some time in the 1920s the family moved to Ireland and settled in Dublin. Living then in a small house, in 28 Raymond Terrace, off Dublin's South Circular Road, the children attended the nearby St Catherine's School in Donore Avenue. It is not clear what Ettie did in Dublin between leaving school and her marriage, but she certainly did work as a seamstress for a time. Her sister Faige, now Fanny Frankel of Toronto, recalled in 2008 that "Ettie had 'golden hands' and was an excellent and creative seamstress." She mentioned that Ettie had been "apprenticed to the best seamstress in Dublin", and that she had "treasured a suit that Ettie had made for her." Another family member has been recorded as describing Ettie as "a beautiful girl, tall and slim with wonderful hands. She was a fantastic dressmaker and embroiderer."

On mainland Europe another family's story was evolving, and there Ettie's future husband was growing up. Vogtjeck (Chaksel) Gluck was a son of Alexander Gluck and Ruzana Grunfeld, of Romanian origin. Ruzana had remarried and was living in Antwerp with her new husband, Wullinger Salomon. Vogtjeck Gluck has been described as being the 'son of an orthodox family of goldsmiths', but it is not entirely clear whether this description refers to the Gluck or Salomon connections. Vogtjeck himself did become a goldsmith, and there were certainly Gluck family goldsmiths in Antwerp at that time. Indeed, the noted Antoinette Gluck was a daughter of Antwerp goldsmiths. Antoinette, who married Rabbi David Feuerwerker, was, with her husband,

active in the French Resistance during the war. She and her colleague, Germaine Ribière, (recognised as Righteous among the Nations), are remembered for organising the evacuation of young Jewish people. In later years Antoinette was involved with the financing of the immigration ship *The Exodus*. The links between Vogtjeck and Antoinette are hazy, but there may be a clue in the fact that one of Antoinette's brothers was called Salomon, the surname of Vogtjeck's mother's second husband.



Photograph courtesy Conan Kennedy

Ettie Steinberg and Vogtjeck Gluck

Ettie Steinberg and Vogtjeck Gluck were married on 22 July 1937 in the Greenville Hall Synagogue on the South Circular Road in Dublin. (Ironically, that same synagogue was to be damaged in one of the very few German bombing attacks on Dublin in the Second World War.)

Following their marriage, the young couple moved to Vogtjeck's family business in Antwerp, setting up home at Steenbokstraat 25. A year or so later, aware of the gathering dangers for the Low Countries, they moved to France and their son, Leon, was born in Paris on 28 March 1939. They then moved south, where they settled.

After moving from place to place in France for two years, in late 1942 the young family found themselves in a hotel in Toulouse. At this time, round-ups of Jews were taking place in the south of France with the approval of the Vichy government, a puppet régime of Nazi Germany. Ettie, Vogtjeck and Leon were discovered and arrested.

Ettie's family in Dublin had succeeded in getting visas for the Gluck family which would allow them to travel to Northern Ireland. When the visas arrived in Toulouse, however, it was too late. Ettie, Vogtjeck and Leon had been arrested the previous day.

On the journey that followed, Ettie wrote a final postcard to her family in Ireland and managed to throw it out of the train window. Extraordinarily, a passer-by found it and posted it.

It passed the censors and found its way to Dublin. The postcard was coded with Hebrew terms and read:

Uncle Lechem, we did not find, but we found Uncle Tisha B'av.

Ettie's family understood her tragic message very well: 'Lechem' is the Hebrew word for bread and 'Tisha B'Av' is a Jewish fast day commemorating the destruction of the temple.

The Steinberg family tried desperately to find out what had become of their daughter, writing to the Red Cross and even the Vatican.

Now living in Israel, Freda Steinberg (wife of Ettie's late brother Solomon) recalled in 2008, "In August 1947 Solly and I were in a kosher restaurant in Prague, where we met many survivors. One of them told us that they had escaped from Antwerp together with Ettie and family and made their difficult way to the south of France, where they slept in different houses most nights. There was a period of relative quiet at one time and so Ettie decided that she would stay where they were. Unfortunately she didn't take the advice of their friends and that was the night when she, her husband and child were taken."

The family were taken to Drancy, a transit camp outside Paris. Freda Steinberg continues, "Solly went to Yad Vashem to see if the Gluck name appeared in any records and, sure enough, details were given of the date they were sent to Auschwitz, the number of the train, which carriage, and the time it left France – true German thoroughness!...The Glucks were deported from Drancy on 2 September 1942 at 8.55am and arrived in Auschwitz on 4 September. One could assume that they were put to death immediately and that the Yahrzeit would be as from 4 September 1942."

That, then, is the story of Ettie Steinberg. She and her son Leon were the only Irish citizens to perish in Auschwitz. Her story is particular to her, but it is also the story of so many millions more. It is linked to them, just as Ettie is linked to the stories of the surviving members of her family.



Leon Gluck in 1940

Photograph courtesy Conan Kennedy

Ettie's sister Fanny married Isaac Frankel. He too had a story. Born in Poland, he'd been a journalist for a daily Yiddish newspaper there. He happened to be on assignment in London when Germany attacked Poland. He made his way to Ireland, where he met and married Fanny. The sole survivor of his family, he became a teacher and rabbi in Dublin, earning his PhD in Trinity College. He later emigrated to Canada. His children Joshua and Sheva still live there.

Of Ettie's other sisters, Rosie (now living in London) married Mr Schleider, and Bessie married Yakov Safran. Their son is David Safran. Their daughter Leah (Frohwein) was born in Dublin, and now lives in Toronto. Another daughter is Esther Warmberg. Mr Safran now lives in Manchester, as does Ettie's brother Jack.

Ettie's young brother Joshua Solomon (Solly) was educated at Dublin's Wesley College, and thence Trinity College. He graduated the same year his sister died in Auschwitz. He was to become a professor at the Technion in Haifa.

The family connections of Ettie Steinberg are thus spread widely around the world, mirroring in many ways the similar emigration of the general Irish population of the time. But Ettie's older brother Louis stayed in Dublin. He married Myra Herman, and he was the founder of the once well known Irish transport company, Camac. Of his two sons, David went into that business with him, while Stanley became a doctor in England. David is now in retirement in Israel, Stanley in the UK.

In 1975 Louis and David Steinberg erected the gates at the Beth Olam in Dublin's Dolphin's Barn cemetery in memory of their father. Aaron Hirsh Steinberg had lived to a great age, a much respected figure in Ireland's Jewish community. In addition to his daughter Ettie, he himself had lost three brothers and many other family members in the Holocaust. He died in 1968, and his wife, Lena Steinberg, in 1973. Louis himself was buried in that cemetery in 1981.

All those dates are a long time from 1942, that gulf illustrating the years of life taken from Ettie and her family. The lives that she and her family would have lived are hidden from us, hidden from us in a darkness – the sort of darkness that we can only illuminate by remembering.

Conan Kennedy

The Holocaust raises in a most awful way the darkest questions the mystery of evil has put to the human race in recent times. We may never get to the bottom of these questions – because, for something this evil, there is in the end no explanation the mind can accept. However, what we cannot explain we must nevertheless remember. The warning contained in memory is our protection, and it is essential to ensure that something like the Holocaust never happens again. Unfortunately, the evil that turns man against man, cheapening, degrading and destroying life, still lurks in the world.

Mary Hanafin TD, Minister for Education and Science, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, 29 January 2006