



As her new play about the persecution of Jewish lawyers in pre-War Germany opens at the New End Theatre in Hampstead, JUDI HERMAN asks writer KATE GLOVER why she chose this theme

"I didn't intend to write this play, this play almost found me" declares Kate Glover. "I stumbled upon this amazing exhibition *Lawyers Without Rights* at the Temple Church. Around the walls were case studies of Jewish lawyers, men and women who'd been banned by Hitler from practising their profession in 1938. Half of the lawyers in 1930s Germany were Jewish – that's 10,000 out of 20,000. Some managed to escape earlier and came here to become distinguished judges and QCs. Others were not so lucky. I found it very moving and realised there was a play here".

Coincidentally, Glover was just back from Budapest, where a visit to the synagogue also had a profound effect on her. "And also the streets around the synagogue where I could almost hear an earlier people, see earlier buildings. This feeling of sadness was still with me when I saw the exhibition. So it hit me here." Her hand is on her heart.

Glover took two contrasting case studies, young lawyers in their 30s, Wilhelm Dickmann (Philip in the play) who had the sense to heed an anonymous tip off to leave Germany "for his holidays" in 1938 and Elisabeth Kohn (Hanna), who delayed her departure for the sake of her mother and sister. "They all died, all deported". There's a catch in her voice:



"I took those two people and invented the love interest. They didn't know each other in life." She says she's giving their real names in the programme. "I also named all the other characters in the play from the case studies. As a mark of respect, so people will know it's based on real histories."

Glover, a seasoned actress herself, plays Hanna's mother. Three of the cast of six are Jewish. "Noa Bodner who plays Hanna is Israeli, Anthony Wolfe who is Philip is half Jewish and Rachel Sternberg is the granddaughter of Sir Sigmund. I'm picking their brains a lot!" she admits.

Glover has good form for a storyteller. She read history at Oxford and started as a history teacher. "I went to Paris to escape a broken engagement and fell into teaching English as a foreign language. I returned after four years to do it here and then in my mid-30s went to drama school."

It was there in 1985 that one of those lucky life-shaping chances came Glover's way. A girl she met at an audition had found some letters written by a soldier in World War I to a little girl. The pair made them into a play touring the British Legions. "We also toured old peoples' homes. It was the old gentlemen who were really moved and for whom it brought back memories of their own experiences. And then I realised I really enjoyed the writing bit." A few years later a friend, vicar of a church in Stratford East only had to murmur "Kate, do you realise that the Jesuit poet Gerald Manley Hopkins was born in my parish and the anniversary of his death is coming?" to inspire her to write a play, which was directed by Clive Swift.

"We opened in a Catholic church on 8 June 1989. Hopkins died on 8 June 1889," she says proudly. Other plays inspired by centenaries followed. A play called *Five Eleven* in 2005, the 400th anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot and *An African's Blood* about the slave trade in 2007. "William Wilberforce managed to get the Abolition of Slavery Act through in 1807", she explains. "Even as a child I always used to tell stories to my younger siblings."

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Her face shines with delight. "I was the oldest and I used to write little plays for my siblings and cousins to act – I dragooned them into it!"

She was born in Yorkshire and the family lived in Kent, Shropshire and Monmouth, where her father was head of Monmouth School. Her parents were at first Nonconformist Christians but eventually became Anglicans. "Religion was never pushed down my throat," she says "I remember saying to my Dad 'I don't believe in any of this' and he said 'well that's all right'. And for 20 years I didn't go to church at all". Then, 25 years ago, she was living off Brick Lane, and fancied going to church on Christmas Day. "So I cycled over to All Hallows by the Tower for Morning Service. And they had – they still do – this giant turkey. Tourists and homeless people, everyone's welcome. I thought this was amazing and I started to go back."

She has attended All Hallows regularly ever since. *Judenfrei* played there last year and in other churches, as well as at The Jewish Museum – and in Henley Council Chamber at the town's Festival.

Even for the Jewish community, learning the fate of Jewish lawyers under Hitler provides perhaps a new piece of the horrific jigsaw puzzle. I'm impressed that Glover seems to want to take *Judenfrei* to non-Jewish audiences, who may be less familiar with the tragic trajectory of such stories.

Holocaust Memorial Day falls during the run of *Judenfrei* at the New End. There will be school groups in the audience and Q & A sessions. And Glover is hoping lawyers will come to see the play too.

There's likely to be more of a Jewish audience at the New End. Glover says, "I want both, I want everybody really. It's a story that should never be forgotten, so we have to keep telling it."

Judenfrei runs at the New End Theatre until 30 January. See WHAT'S HAPPENING page 29.