

KURT KRISZHABER MEMORIAL PROJECT

The project to place a monument on the unmarked grave of Kurt Kriszhaber derived from an exhibition at the Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Naples, Florida. In that exhibition a letter was shown which had been written by Kurt Kriszhaber from his internment camp in Tatura, Australia.

In the letter he mentions a number of his relatives and wants to know if there is any news about them.

David Nelson, a former BBC television producer who worked at the museum and who had an interest in family history started to look for more information about the people mentioned in the letter.

He discovered that Kurt's mother had died in Vienna in 1928 when Kurt was only seven. His father, Franz, was a jeweller, and had been in Antwerp in 1940 when the Germans invaded and was then deported to internment camps in the south of France before being transferred to Drancy transit camp in Paris, and then on to Auschwitz and his death in 1944.

Kurt's Uncle Paul and Aunt Gretel were rounded up in Vienna and sent to the Minsk ghetto in November 1941 where they were murdered. His maternal grandparents were transported to the Theresienstadt ghetto and they too died in 1943 and 1944.

Kurt had a half-sister called Martha who managed to survive the war in Vienna despite being constantly watched and harassed by the Gestapo.

Kurt was born on 11 March 1921 in Vienna. He came to England in May 1939 and initially worked on a farm in Northamptonshire before being transferred to another in Staffordshire. After Churchill's "Collar the Lot" order in June 1940, Kurt was arrested as an enemy alien and ended up aboard the HMT Dunera en route to Australia in July 1940. He disembarked at Sydney, was trained to Hay and then ended up in Tatura Camp. He wrote the letter from there in November 1941. He then joined the Australian Employment Company, and at the end of the war applied for Australian citizenship which he got in July 1946.

The official announcement was in the Government Gazette on 5th September, but on 7th September Kurt was dead, gassed in a bathroom in Alma Road, Melbourne.

David Nelson produced a presentation all about Kurt's tragic story and to finish it off, asked his niece who lived in Melbourne to get a photograph of Kurt's grave. Seeing that it was just a bare patch of earth, he decided to get a monument for the grave. In fact, in May 2017 he contacted the Dunera association asking for their help but at the time, their committee told him "unfortunately due to financial considerations we are not in a position to join you on the project". Following another showing of David's presentation, a lady visitor to the Holocaust Museum offered \$500 to kick off an appeal and David launched a GoFundMe in August 2018. About 100 individual people contributed – members of David's Genealogical Society, Visitors and Docents at the Museum, David's family and Friends, contacts of the USC Shoah Institute in Los Angeles, individual members of the Dunera Association, and a final \$500 from the Mosaica Organization in Jerusalem – and by March 2019 the target was reached.

A considerable hurdle to the project was establishing who had the "right of interment" and could allow a monument to be placed. David's research into Probate records and correspondence in Australian National Archives established that State Trustees held the right but also that Kurt's half-sister had been trying to release his estate over a period of fifteen years. State Trustees gave permission for the project to go ahead.

David then ordered the grave marker from Melbourne Memorials, and was offered a consecration by Michael Cohen of the Jewish Holocaust Centre. David re-established contact with the Dunera Association as being the best people to liaise, organize and publicize the consecration event, and was happy to hand over the finalization of the project to Ron Reichwald and the Association.

EVENT

This consecration of the tombstone of the Late Kurt Kriszhaber will take place at Fawkner Cemetery Melbourne on Sunday 21st March 2021 at 11 am AEST, being the 100th anniversary of the birth of Kurt Kriszhaber

This event will be streamed on our Facebook page 'Friends of the Dunera Boys' live