



Simple tributes to lives cut short

By Sebastian Hall

The issue of how to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust has long been central to European nations' attempts to come to terms with that terrible inheritance. The prominent Holocaust memorials of Berlin, Vienna, and many others, force passers-by to gaze upon symbolic reminders of the murder of millions of Jews.



Embedded: Hermine's Solperstein in the pavement

The Stolperstein, by contrast, is a far less conspicuous but no less profound attempt to address this. Small golden squares on the pavements of Europe's great cities bear the names of those Jewish residents who

were deported from those streets and killed. The simplicity of the squares reflects the ordinary lives of integrated European Jews before the Shoah. It was such a life that



Tribute to a life: Sebastian Hall's family gather in Vienna in memory of his great-great-grandmother Hermine Goldstein

brought nearly 50 members of my family to Vienna late last year to commemorate our ancestor, my great-great-great grandmother Hermine Goldstein.

Having fled Vienna for Yugoslavia, Hermine was deported by Nazi collaborators in July 1942 and murdered in a concentration camp in Croatia. Two of her five children spent time in concentration camps, with one being killed in Auschwitz and the other, my ancestor, surviving Bergen Belsen.

While the Stolperstein conveys a simple devastation—that of a normal life destroyed, anonymously among the millions—it is worth taking heed of a certain ambivalence in our own experience in this commemoration: the extraordinary showing of our family;

the celebratory dinner the night before; the music composed for the occasion; the photos of a cheerful, sprawling family.

A weekend based on commemorating death was also one of celebrating the life of a fundamentally European woman: born in Slovakia, grew up and married in Serbia, raised a family in Bulgaria, retired in Vienna. In the elegant Viennese

apartment metres above street level in which she once lived I had a palpable sense of a woman who lived as well as one who tragically died.

If the Holocaust remains incomprehensible in its destructiveness, the Stolperstein now stands on Böcklinstrasse in Vienna's second district as a tangible, permanent tribute to the life that was Hermine's.



Ancestors: Sebastian Hall

Make friends with a literary classic

Ulysses by James Joyce has the reputation of being one of the most challenging novels ever written... but here in East Finchley there is an expert reading group on hand to help.

Local resident Russell Raphael created North London Ulysses in 2019, since when he has been publicly reading and explaining the novel in pubs around East Finchley and guiding eager readers through its pages.

Russell says he loves reading it out loud and to an audience. He enjoys the noise it makes, the accents, the commotion, the shock at its naughty bits, the hilarity of its funny bits and the pin-dropping silence at its tender parts.



Reading circle: Russell Raphael

It takes around 40 weekly readings to finish and then he starts again with another group of eager listeners who invariably add a new twist to his own understanding. Russell calls it a vibrant symbiotic dynamic with no prior knowledge required.

The next full reading will start on 19 January at 8pm in The Clissold Arms, 105 Fortis Green, N2. It will then be each Monday evening through the year, finishing in late November 2026. The readings are complimented by weekly videos offering a taste of the reading and full explanatory analysis, so those who can't make the pub can enjoy the experience remotely.

The pub readings are free, but it is of course polite to support the venue. There is a modest charge for the analytical videos. Russell is the author of two Ulysses-related books. An Understanding of Ulysses and The Fine Trouser of Almidano Artifoni. If interested in joining the next reading, email russell@northlondonulysses.org.

Much-loved youth leader: June James, 1936-2025

June James, a lifetime resident of East Finchley, died peacefully aged 89 on 30 October 2025. Spending her whole life in the same house in Leicester Road, June was a familiar figure to many in N2.

Throughout her life she was a leading light in the Methodist Church on the High Road, teaching in the Junior Church and leading the Girl Guides and the Boys' Brigade.

Through her youth work, she came into contact with a large number of young people, many of whom remained in touch with her. Some may remember her at the head of the Boys' Brigade Band marching down the High Road. June was a great supporter of many local groups, including

the Finchley Society and the National Trust, and could always be seen on the Methodist Church's stand at the East Finchley Festival.

A huge Arsenal fan, she was proud of telling everybody that she had attended or watched every match since she was a teenager.

There will be a Service of Thanksgiving for her life on Friday 16 January 2026 at 2pm at East Finchley Methodist Church, 197 High Road, N2 8AJ. All are welcome.



Leading light: June James