

# *Hot off the Press 26!*

*Members recommend.....*

## **The Story of Matt Lucas' Grandma**

The very moving story of Matt Lucas and his German Grandma. He learns what his late grandmother went through as a Jew in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, and what happened to the family she left behind. He also uncovers a connection to Anne Frank.

"Comedian, presenter and actor Matt Lucas had an exceptionally close bond with his late grandmother, Margot, who came to the UK in 1939 as a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany."

**A warning that it may be upsetting for some members  
as it relates to concentration camps.**

**It's on Iplayer for the next 11 months** - BBC One - Who Do You Think You Are?, Series 19, Matt Lucas. (Ctrl + click on link below to open up document)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0018bjf>

## **Book Reviews from The Times newspaper**

**"The School that Escaped the Nazis"** by Deborah Cadbury. It is about a German woman Anna Essinger, a teacher, who saw how things were going in Germany in the 1930s and brought her Jewish school children to Kent and founded a school there (Bunce Court). This was even before Kurt Hahn brought over his school from Schloss Salem to Gordonstoun

The book **"Berlin"** by Sinclair McKay with subtitle "Life and Loss in the City that Shaped the Century" and the indomitable spirit of Berliners in the 20th century.

# Hot off the Press 26!

Members recommend.....

## Herschel's discovery remembered – The Observer 17/07/2022



A commemorative stone will be unveiled next month in the garden of 19 New King Street, Bath, to mark the exact spot where William Herschel rested his homemade telescope and first glimpsed Uranus. The event – on 25 August – will form a key part of celebrations, which began this weekend, to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of the German-born astronomer.

Herschel died on 25 August 1822, and the new exhibition at his home – now the Herschel Museum of Astronomy – will include his observation book in which he wrote notes from the night he first observed Uranus. Also on show will be a catalogue

of stars recorded by his sister Caroline, a professional astronomer in her own right, a prolific discoverer of comets, and the first woman to receive a salary as a scientist.

William Herschel was also a gifted musician and could play the oboe, violin, harpsichord and organ and composed numerous concertos and symphonies. His scientific achievements include the first detection of infrared radiation; the observation that the pole caps of Mars vary seasonally; and the later discovery of previously unobserved moons around Saturn.

However, the discovery of Uranus remains his main claim to fame. Intriguingly, Herschel originally wanted to name it after his patron, King George III, which would have made it Georgium Sidus, or George's Star. However, the moniker was not widely liked outside England and eventually the name Uranus was agreed – although it did not get full international acceptance until the middle of the 19th century. **RM**



NASA/JPL-CALTECH-GETTY

<https://www.nasa.gov/feature/240-years-ago-astronomer-william-herschel-identifies-uranus-as-the-seventh-planet>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/william-herschel-and-discovery-planet-uranus>



# Hot off the Press 26!

Members recommend.....

## Memoir

### What did you do in the war?

#### **In My Grandfather's Shadow** **Angela Findlay**

*Bantam Press, £20, pp432*

A week after she was born to an English father and German mother, Angela Findlay's maternal grandfather died. Yet "like a relay racer passing on a baton", she writes, "he handed me something... just as we might inherit the physical or character traits of our forebears, we can inherit their unresolved emotions, traumas or crimes".

Much of this strange, powerful but rather unsatisfactory memoir explores Findlay's relationship with her difficult mother, Jutta. Glamorous, energetic and sociable, she was also a woman for whom



"any allusion to weakness or failure always seemed to evoke the opposite of sympathy or compassion". She often made remarks about her daughters' weight and imagined futures for them involving "a sensible job with a vibrant social life, puffed up like a meringue in silk taffeta dresses, charming husband in tow". The family learned to "tread warily" and "collude in protecting [her] inner vulnerability".

Her mother was deeply shaped, Findlay argues, by the privations and dangers of her wartime childhood, when her father was away fighting for a decade. At the age of eight, for example, she was taken to a railway station to give water and coffee to wounded and dying soldiers.

*Angela Findlay's grandfather, Karl von Graffen (middle), c1942. Privates Fotoalbum*

In any event, Findlay rebelled against her mother's ideals of bourgeois domesticity. She was drawn to "tricky men", she writes, "and found a role for myself in their suffering or dysfunction". She found "relief and a strange sense of homecoming" in teaching art to often violent criminals in several countries. And I very much liked the sound of an artwork called *Rock Drop*, where she explored her



# Hot off the Press 26!

Members recommend.....

ambivalence about her dual heritage by “laying a bistro table with a pair of typical English and German breakfasts” – and then dropping 10 kilo boulders on it from the high arm of a fire engine.

The book is centrally about transgenerational trauma, and convincingly shows us how Findlay’s self-doubt, depression and “acting out” were partly caused by her mother’s unacknowledged demons. But she also believes, much less plausibly, that she is in some sense haunted by the grandfather she never knew.

Karl von Graffen was a career soldier, wrote a book on ballistic missiles and became the head of an artillery school, where he once had to host a visit from Hitler. When war broke out, he was transferred to the supreme high command and spent a little more than two years on the eastern front, eventually as a commander. He later served in Italy before being imprisoned by the allies. Once released and back home, “with no work for returning generals”, as Findlay puts it, he was “reduced to whittling wooden yo-yos and selling them door-to-door”.

Reading one of his letters home from 1941, she finds him “a macho bully, the kind of self-justifying army officer I would have vociferously challenged had he been

alive”. Yet she remains desperate to “cast him as a ‘good soldier’ who obeyed orders out of a sense of duty rather than conviction”. She therefore made the remarkable decision to follow in his footsteps by going to Russia, accompanied by her 75-year-old and severely diabetic mother. By “inhabiting the same patch of earth trodden by my grandfather”, she explains, she hoped for an improbable epiphany that would provide “the key to understanding what sort of man he had been”. She even left symbolic offerings of his beloved tobacco and some soil from her garden at various sites associated with him in Germany, though she is self-aware enough to admit that her “grandfather might have thrown such esoteric claptrap back in my face”.

If all this has brought Findlay some closure, that is obviously a good thing. But it still feels highly unsettling to watch a woman who has dedicated her book to “all those whose lives are affected by discrimination, oppression or war” searching so desperately for redeeming qualities in a decorated Wehrmacht general. **Matthew Reisz**

*To order *In My Grandfather's Shadow* for £17.40 go to [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com) or call 020-3176 3837*