

Chapter Five

To Oxford and on to Melbourne

What I do now, is draw attention to the spirit of supportive collegiality.

– Barbara Falk

Caught in a Snare: Hitler's Refugee Academics 1933-1949

The Schüllers went to Oxford on the basis of an invitation from the Nuffield Professor of Surgery, Hugh Cairns. Cairns was an Adelaide graduate who had been trained by Harvey Cushing in the USA and had subsequently spent most of his professional career in the United Kingdom. He was widely regarded not only as a brilliant surgeon but also as a charismatic and generous individual. Cairns, it seems, had never visited Vienna but it is known for certain that he met Schüller in Stockholm in the early 1930s and subsequently at scientific meetings throughout Europe. Schüller had also made several visits to the United Kingdom prior to 1938, and this had provided ample opportunity to develop something more than a professional relationship.

The exact nature of the invitation, and what Schüller could expect in Oxford, is unknown, but there is a strong suggestion that he had already made up his mind to leave Europe. Cairns' invitation to Schüller was entirely typical of the man. Given the difficulties with employing senior foreign academics, particularly one within a few months of the mandatory retirement age of sixty-five, the invitation surely had a personal connection.

The path the Schüllers took from Vienna to Oxford is poorly documented, but Grete said that they had gone to Norway and then from Oslo to Britain. Many doubted this at the time but it is almost certainly correct. The number of Jewish people seeking emigration was increased by those caught in the Sudeten annexation, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to gain entry to the countries sharing borders with the new Germany.

The invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia in 1939 meant another flood. Now it was virtually impossible to move out of German territory across any of its land borders, and it is well documented that people were forced to travel right across greater Germany from Vienna at the south-eastern extremity to the northern extremity where they could leave by sea from Bremen or Hamburg. It must have been an exhausting business, and there were risks both in exiting Germany and in gaining entry into another country.

On 17 August 1938, a group of Jewish refugees attempted to land in Helsinki, but they were too late. The Finnish Cabinet had closed the border to incoming Jewish people four days earlier because it was alarmed by the number of arrival visas which had been issued by their embassy in Vienna without prior permission from the government. This group of refugees were denied entry and the boat ordered to return to Germany.

It is possible that Arthur's and Grete's son Franz was involved in this voyage because of his familiarity with Finland. The Stiassni family believed this to be so. The families had always thought Franz a little eccentric because it was his habit to take his holidays each year with friends in Finland instead of Italy "like any sensible normal person". If he was in that group, he was returned to Germany.



In later life, Grete sadly reminisced to friends that their son Franz had accompanied them to Oslo, but she had sent him back to Czechoslovakia to attend to some financial matters, thereby sending him to his death. Nobody believed this as her mind often wandered in her last years; she likely confused a return from Oslo with the strong

likelihood that Franz had been in the attempted Finnish landing and had to return rather from Helsinki. Franz might have been either in Vienna or Brno when his parents left in April 1939. By then Bohemia and Moravia had become German Protectorates (15 March 1939) and, as one family member remarked later, no one in their right mind would have tried to return, even if the Germans permitted it, unless driven by some extreme circumstance.

Franz, who had lived with his grandmother since his mid-teens, was deeply attached to her and this might have been that circumstance. But on balance, we may conclude that the boys remained in Brno for whatever reasons or returned there. Documents indicate Prague was Franz's last address before deportation to Terezin and eventually Auschwitz.

Hans (interred 04/04/1942) and his wife and daughter (both interred 31/03/1942) were transported from Brno to Terezin. The Morgan obituary claims that the two boys were prevented from leaving Vienna at the last minute but this is clearly a misconception. The one certainty is that the Schüllers did reach Oxford without their sons and that they would never see or hear from them again.

Schüller was immediately invited into the scholarly haven of the Nuffield Institute for Medical Research where his friend Alfred Barclay, the academic doyen of British radiology, had arranged a position for him. This was to be his base for the next two months. Barclay and Schüller knew each other well, both enjoying the reputation of never missing an international radiology meeting in Europe.

It seems clear that Schüller did not ask for assistance then to remain in England, but viewed this position, that Cairns had set up with Barclay, as a staging post. Schüller was not on the university payroll and his name does not appear in the archives of the university or in the records of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL). The SPSL was set up in 1933, under a different name originally, with the aim of helping displaced academics into British universities. The aims of this society restricted their capacity to be of much help to Arthur Schüller because, only a few months

short of retirement age, it would have been virtually impossible for them to find a position or university finance for him. He must have known this.



In his later years Schüller spoke warmly of his time at the Nuffield Institute; the university professor was at home among his distinguished peers. He certainly lost no time in settling in. Professor Wilfrid Le Gros Clark gave him facilities in the Department of Anatomy to continue his research in the radiological demonstration of the subarachnoid cisterns at the base of the brain. This work led to a publication in the *British Journal of Radiology*, and in it, Schüller acknowledged his indebtedness to the Nuffield Institute, Barclay and Le Gros Clark. His young colleague from the Institute of Neurology in Vienna, Benno Schlesinger, was already working in Le Gros Clark's department, supported by a Rockefeller Fellowship. He remained on as a member of the department after the fellowship expired, and after the war moved to America.

From the beginning, Cairns made Schüller part of all the activities of the Nuffield Department of Surgery, which was devoted entirely to neurosurgery, and he moved easily between it and the Nuffield Institute, less than a hundred metres away. He saw little of Hugh Cairns because Cairns spent much of his time in London advising the government on surgical services for the impending war, only a few weeks away, as well as developing and directing the head injury services for the British Army. The work of the department was left largely to Cairns' First Assistant, Joe Pennybacker, a young American who had trained in both neurology and neurosurgery in London, and who was rapidly making a reputation as a master surgeon and a brilliant diagnostician.

Schüller was captivated by Pennybacker's talents and personality, and the overall quality of the department, which was clearly superior to the neurosurgery in Vienna at that time. He mentioned this later to Australian colleagues more than once.² Hugh Cairns, a man of relentless energy, was assisting the SPSL and other organisations helping

displaced scientists. Francis Schiller, a neurologist from Prague, was taken into his unit as a house surgeon and research assistant, and he placed a young Viennese neuropathologist, Eugen Pollak, with his colleague Geoffrey Jefferson in Manchester.

The Spanish Civil War produced a different group of refugees, among whom was Pio del Rio Hortega, arguably the most prominent histologist of the brain of his time. Cairns installed him as the neuropathologist in his department. Arthur Schüller saw him as a comrade in adversity, but the sad and depressed del Rio Hortega showed little interest in a friendship.



By inviting Schüller to Oxford, Cairns had begun the chain of welcome and support which landed the Schüllers in Melbourne three months later. They had probably abandoned the Brisbane plan before going to Oxford but, if not, they were now turned elsewhere by a consortium from Melbourne who all had their connections to Oxford and two of whom had direct experience of Schüller. Cairns had trained Frank Morgan, the first neurosurgeon at St Vincent's Hospital, and they kept in contact. Barclay had a special relationship with John O'Sullivan, who was the senior radiologist at the same hospital. O'Sullivan had spent the middle years of the 1920s in England studying and working; he took a course for the Cambridge Diploma of Diagnostic Radiology and Medical Electrology and then submitted himself for the examination. He achieved a perfect score, and the chairman of the board of examiners – Barclay – refused to believe that he had not cheated; he was required to take the examination again with a completely new set of unrelated questions. Again a perfect score. Barclay promptly gave O'Sullivan a job in his own department and later promoted him to assistant radiologist.

Not surprisingly, this was the beginning of a friendship between the two which continued over time; years later when O'Sullivan was in an executive position in the Royal Australasian Association of Radiologists, he secured the services of Barclay as the official representative of the Association at the British Institute of Radiology.

O'Sullivan also knew Schüller; he had met him in 1924 and 1927 in Vienna when attending his courses on skull radiology, but had not maintained a correspondence with him afterwards.

Both O'Sullivan and Morgan, in frequent correspondence with their Oxford mentors, were anxious to help and surely, were not entirely unmindful of the prize they would bring to their city, hospital and departments.

The final Melbourne connection to Oxford and Schüller was Sydney Sunderland, the newly appointed Professor of Anatomy in the University of Melbourne. Schüller met him in Le Gros Clark's department, where Sunderland was completing a period of research. They both left Oxford for Melbourne at about the same time, Sunderland to visit America on the way.³ In Melbourne they were to meet again as colleagues when Sunderland, after consolidating his new role, offered Schüller an unsalaried research position in his department in 1941.



While the other two members of the Melbourne consortium no doubt played their roles, it seems that it was John O'Sullivan who was primarily responsible for the process that brought Arthur to his new country and his new professional life. Around St Vincent's Hospital, the sense was that John O'Sullivan and Frank Morgan were jointly responsible. The full details can never be known for certain now, but the legend at least over-simplifies their respective roles. A more mature assessment of the available information, and discussion with the few remaining persons who knew Schüller at St Vincent's Hospital, gives the central role to O'Sullivan.

Brian Egan, in his masterful history of St Vincent's Hospital, came to a similar conclusion as the author on this point. Despite the serendipitous meeting of Schüller and Sydney Sunderland, in Le Gros Clark's Anatomy Department in Oxford, the timing and location would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for Sunderland to have negotiated the necessary arrangements. Obtaining a visa for Australia took some months and almost certainly required support from someone in Australia at the time. Two names appear on the

Schüller's arrival documents, a Mr Harald S Nettheim of Brisbane and Dr Edward Prendergast of Melbourne. Netheim, a stockbroker had met Schüller eleven years earlier in Cairo but nothing is known of the connection with Dr Prendergast. It was believed that Schüller had a cousin in Brisbane but it is not known if he and Nettheim were related or even knew each other.

Furthermore, Schüller was able to commence work at St Vincent's Hospital within a very short period of time after his arrival. Not only was Schüller's new position, irregular as it was, ready for him when he arrived, so were the critical financial arrangements. O'Sullivan is probably the only one who could have set these things in place; in 1939, he was head of the radiology department and a senior clinician around the hospital. He was clearly in a position to assist Schüller; this behaviour was entirely consistent with a man who was known for his great generosity and passionate commitment to social justice.

As we have seen, O'Sullivan and Barclay appear to have stayed in touch during the years before the war. Barclay may have had a hand in re-establishing contact between Schüller and O'Sullivan, who had reportedly not been in contact since O'Sullivan attended Schüller's courses in Vienna years earlier. On the other hand Frank Morgan had only returned from London three years earlier to become the hospital's first neurosurgeon. In 1939, he was still a relatively junior member of the senior medical staff, and as such not in a position to materially influence the hospital hierarchy. Morgan had not met him prior to his arrival in Melbourne, and may not have been familiar with the extent of work produced by Schüller. Nearly all of Schüller's publications to that time were in German, and as Morgan had trained in the United Kingdom he had received limited exposure to this literature.

The likely scenario is that Schüller had already decided on a move to Australia, and this decision was reinforced by the offer that came from O'Sullivan who was likely made aware of the Schüllers and their desire to move to Australia through his contacts in the UK. Frank Morgan, once he became aware of Schüller's arrival, understood the importance of such a prominent neuroradiologist to the neurosurgical

unit at St Vincent's which was less than a handful of years old and became highly supportive.

Arthur Schüller left one last mark before leaving Europe. Some time in 1938, a meeting of experts in the radiology of the skull and brain was arranged for the summer of 1939 in Antwerp. They aimed to establish international meetings of the group on a regular basis in the future. The two giant figures of the day were Schüller and Eric Lysholm of Stockholm, around whom were grouped some fifty radiologists from Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Italy and the Scandinavian countries, all by invitation.

On 23 July 1939, Arthur crossed to Antwerp for his last contact with continental Europe. The meeting ran from 24 to 28 July, and Schüller gave three papers, two in French and one in English. Characteristic of him was his desire to have his friend Walter Dandy included in the list of distinguished clinicians, and he sought Dandy's approval to nominate him for membership of this new association. Dandy agreed but in the event he did not attend, which is not surprising given the state of the world in July 1939. This was essentially a European exercise, and even though similar moves were afoot in America (and separately in Italy) at about that time, this meeting marked the beginning of a truly international forum.

When the neuroradiologists of the world met in an international forum in Rotterdam to form the Second Symposium *Neuroradiologicum* in 1949, they unanimously declared the Antwerp meeting to have been the first.

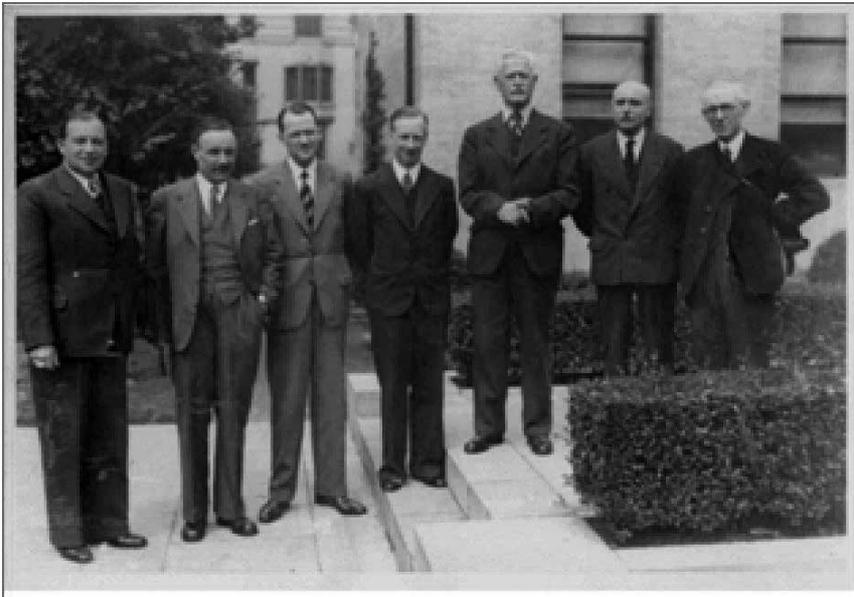


At the end of the 1939 meeting came the inevitable group photograph. Schüller was placed in the middle of the front row. Arthur Schüller stood with his head bowed and turned away from the camera, his hands clasped loosely in front of him, but he stood erect.

From Antwerp, Schüller went back to Oxford and then to London and onward to Australia. He never returned to Europe. Schüller spoke only sparingly of his reasons for coming to Australia. A dominant theme, however, was that Europe had failed him twice. Personally,

professionally and financially, he had been devastated by the First World War, and the prospect of another war supercharged with the racial overtones of national socialism was enough for him to quit the Old World for the New. Why he chose Australia rather than the US, particularly as he had a standing invitation from his great friend Walter Dandy, has never been satisfactorily explained. But there was always a hint, as with many others who fled Europe around this time, of the desire to get as far away as possible.

Some who knew Schüller well suggested, with half a grain of truth, that he loved the grand symbolic gesture, but all would agree that he was a rigorous thinker who made his decisions logically and without emotion.



Antwerp 24-28 July 1938, meeting of European Neuroradiologists. Schüller is on the top step towering over his colleagues (he was 173 cm tall). In 1946 at the Symposium Neuroradiologicum this Antwerp meeting was acclaimed as the First Symposium Neuroradiologicum.

Arthur Schüller: Founder of Neuroradiology

Dr John O'Sullivan, Radiologist, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne. O'Sullivan more than anyone else was responsible for getting Schüller to St Vincent's and then supported him during the early years of his time in Melbourne.



A formal portrait of Frank Morgan, taken in the old Neurosurgical Unit office, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne; the microscope was an instrument with which he had little familiarity. The picture out of focus on the wall immediately behind Morgan is Julian Smith's portrait of Arthur Schüller.