

# AN INVITATION TO DUNERA DESCENDANTS

The AJR is pleased to welcome the creation of a new group focusing on descendants of refugees who were shipped to Australia on the HMT Dunera in July 1940. Alan Lion, the son of one of those refugees, explains more.

For the past two years I have been researching my Jewish family's WW2 experiences. My father, Ernst Max Lion (known as Ernest, he hated the name Max), only briefly talked of his experiences, which is often typical of those who escaped the Nazi regime. I was aware my father was interned during the summer of 1940 and subsequently deported to Australia aboard the *HMT Dunera*. I had little understanding of the circumstances and had just a small file that I found after my father passed to further my understanding of his experience.

I joined the Australia-based Dunera Association to learn more and discovered that there had been a UK based group established during the 1980s by survivors but that it had long since closed as the members aged and passed. The last UK resident survivor passed away in 2021 and with less than five survivors elsewhere (now all over 99 years of age) I was determined that the experiences



Ernest Lion (present)



Ernest Lion during WW2

of those interned would be remembered, and that the second and third generations of the internees should be informed of this 'missing' piece of British history.

Realising that I could not do this alone, I convened a small group of Dunera internee descendants and interested historians with the intention of forming a new online 'UK Dunera Interest Group'. The group's primary objectives are to promote understanding of the circumstances and discover the experiences of those deported overseas by gathering and sharing the knowledge from the families of those involved.

For the 2,546 internees aboard the *HMT Dunera* the circumstances were inevitably life-changing but their experiences and recollections vary considerably, especially as the cohort included Germans, Austrians, Czechs as well as Italians. Although the vast majority were Jewish or political refugees from the Nazis, there were a minority aboard whose sympathies were not allied to the British cause. Some experiences concentrate on the privations of internment and the appalling conditions aboard the *Dunera*, whilst others (particularly the youngsters) recalled this time as an adventure and one of the most formative times of their lives. Some were only too glad to be far away from war-torn Europe and had volunteered for the deportation, others had no idea where they were

being sent and all had been separated from family and loved ones. Every story is different!

We are grateful to the AJR who have agreed to support the Dunera UK Group, by posting information on their website, and helping us to gauge community support. We hope that any AJR members involved or interested in this lost part of WWII history will sign up to join us. They will receive emails from the group along with details of on-line events. Once established this will hopefully extend to in person events, and possibly small exhibitions.

Whether you are a descendant of a Dunera internee, connected in some other way, or simply interested in this period of history, we welcome you to our community. Our group will provide a platform for information exchange, discussion, and networking among individuals who share a common interest in this fascinating topic. Although principally aimed at UK residents, we will welcome members from around the world, particularly from Europe, Israel, and the USA. Although those living in Australia are well served by their Dunera Association many may be interested in learning more about internment prior to the departure to Australia and the circumstances and policies which led to the Dunera saga and the opportunities for obtaining authorisation for return and release in the UK or release in Australia.

Email [al.lion@dunera.org.uk](mailto:al.lion@dunera.org.uk) for more information or see <https://dunera.org.uk>

HMT Dunera

