

DORA MINNA LIEBMANN born 13.7.1906

Dora Minna Badt (known as Dodo) was born in 1906 in Berlin and lived there until her emigration to England in 1937. She was the second of three children, with a sister Ilse one year older and a brother Erich 11 years younger, to whom she was very close. Her father Albert Badt was a businessman and her mother Emmy looked after the home, with the aid of several servants. Albert's business did well for many years but failed in the German inflation in the 1920s.

Dodo's father came from an orthodox Jewish family, her mother from a liberal Jewish family. So the family celebrated the main Jewish festivals but were otherwise not involved in religion. However, the family mixed in mostly Jewish circles, as anti-Semitism was widespread. There were large families of aunts, uncles and cousins on both sides of the family, so most parties consisted of relatives.

Dodo was very intelligent from her early years, but it took some persuasion from her to be allowed to transfer to a grammar school (*Gymnasium*) rather than the less demanding ordinary secondary school, as she was the only academic one in her family. She attended Auguste-Viktoria Schule 1912-1921 and Fürstin-Bismarck-Schule 1921-1925, both in Charlottenburg. She did well at school, passing the *Abitur* (school-leaving examination) with very high grades, and then went on to study physics, mainly at Berlin University. Her other love was law but her father advised her that she was more likely (as a Jew) to find work in the scientific field. She spent one semester at Heidelberg University but had to return home when her father died unexpectedly in 1926. It was a very exciting time to be studying physics, as many of her lecturers and tutors were famous names in the new theories such as relativity and the uncertainty principle.

Dodo and her family lived through difficult times in Germany. Dodo was a child during World War 1, and remembered knitting socks for her uncle who was serving as a soldier. Soon after the end of the war, Germany suffered a devastating inflation, during which time the family lost all their money, and any jewellery had to be sold. The family also had to move to a cheaper flat, which created problems between Dodo and her mother, and she moved out to a bedsitter in 1930.

The poor economic situation also meant that Dodo needed to earn money alongside her studies. She first undertook coaching of school students, then later worked at Osram Research Laboratories. She often struggled to complete her university work but somehow managed it, and then undertook her D.Phil research at Osram. She was part of a close friendship group with other professionals there.

She met her husband, Gerhard Liebmann (Gert), through her university studies – he was also studying physics, and by chance was placed in her section at Osram as a work student. They often found themselves together in practical classes and on student trips. They first met at the age of 20, but did not marry until 1936, when they were 29.

Dodo left Osram in 1931, after being 'advised to resign' because of problems with a new boss, and was unemployed for a few months. Gert meanwhile had obtained his degree in 1930 and was working at Loewe, a radio manufacturer. He managed to engineer an assistant position for her to help in his job, keeping their relationship well-hidden. She worked long hours and wrote up her thesis in the evenings. The pay was only just enough for her rent and very basic food, but at a time of great unemployment, she was just grateful to have a job. She was dismissed from her job in November 1933 because she took some unpaid leave to complete her thesis – Hitler had come to power in April 1933, and Dodo was worried she might not be allowed to graduate if she left it any longer. Gert was able to continue at Loewe until he emigrated, because one of the directors was Jewish, so they didn't sack Jewish employees as many other firms did.

As is well known, everything became very difficult for Jews after 1933, including for Dodo. She became politically involved in 1931 and joined the Communist Party in 1933, after Hitler came to power. She saw the Communist Party as the only active group doing underground resistance work against the Nazis – and which did not discriminate against Jews. She took part in distributing forbidden literature, which involved dangerous meetings with other members of the group. On a couple of occasions she managed to burn or flush underground papers down the toilet just as Gestapo police were knocking on her door. To keep themselves sane, Dodo and Gert spent weekends on their small sailing boat in the Grunewald near Berlin.

Dodo finally got her D.Phil degree in February 1934. She had to submit her thesis (on ultra-red radiation) and pass an oral examination in four subjects: Experimental Physics, Theoretical Physics, Mathematics and Philosophy. This involved finding professors in each subject willing to examine her, no easy feat as many of them were anti-Semitic, and some were anti-women as well. Many of her scientific friends helped to coach her because of the strain. After that she found jobs in the radio industry doing unskilled work, trying to avoid any personal questions. She was made redundant at the end of 1934.

As unemployment benefit was not enough to live on, and jobs were almost impossible to find, Dodo started working freelance on a monthly journal of abstracts for the radio industry, called *Fortschritte der Funktechnik* ('Progress in the Radio Industry'), which she sold widely to European universities and museums. She was nearly offered a post to continue this at the Technical University in Berlin, but this was withdrawn because she was Jewish. She stopped publishing the journal soon after, to avoid suspicion from the authorities. She described this as her worst experience of anti-Semitism. For the rest of her time in Germany, she did some teaching, coaching and literature searches for scientists.

Dodo and Gert got married in 1936 as part of their plan to emigrate, so that Dodo could be included if Gert managed to get a job. Dodo's flat was too small for them both, but the Jewish landlord managed to find a larger flat for them after a few months.

Gert managed to get a job in England through friends already there, who submitted his papers for a suitable post. He then travelled to England for the interview, and the friends

wrote to him in code that he had been successful. He unfortunately told his boss, with the result that his passport was confiscated. After three weeks of anxiety, he managed to retrieve it and left for Paris on the next train, and from there to England. Dodo wrapped up their whole life in 36 hours and followed.

They initially stayed with friends in London, then moved to Cambridge for Gert to take up his job in January 1937. In 1938 he was transferred to London briefly, then back to Cambridge in Autumn 1939, just before the start of the war. Dodo spent this time largely hosting visitors and other people who were refugees passing through or trying to make contacts in England. During this time both her sister and her mother died, but of course Dodo could not attend their funerals. She and Gert managed to get Gert's parents out of Germany and into England, in March 1939. They found housing for them nearby. Dodo also worked at Woburn House in London, helping to get children and young people out of Germany on the Kindertransport.

When the war broke out, Dodo and Gert switched to English as their everyday language. They could not bear to speak German any more. Then in 1939-1940 they were both interned (in separate camps) on the Isle of Man for nine months; it was less usual for women to be interned, but their local Internment Tribunal was over-cautious. While there Dodo helped to organise applications for release. When they returned, Gert took up his job at Pye again. Dodo would have liked to work but was not given Home Office permission. Then they had their two children, Marian and Stephen, born in 1942 and 1945 respectively. As soon as the war was over, Dodo and Gert applied for British citizenship, which they achieved in 1946. Money was very short as they were trying to support Gert's parents as well as their growing family.

In Germany Dodo and Gert had worked on resistors for radios, and had brought a process with them to England for manufacturing high-stability carbon resistors. They wanted to sell the process to an existing company, but no one believed it could work, so in 1946 they started their own factory, Cambridge Electrical Components Ltd (CELCO), to show that it could be done. Initially they were both involved, but in 1947 Gert got a new job working away from home, so Dodo took over the management. In 1949, having demonstrated that the process worked, she was able to sell it to a larger company looking to expand its range. She continued as a consultant for three years, receiving royalties which made a big difference to the family finances over the years. In between everything else, Dodo and Gert also designed a circular slide rule, and had prototypes made.

Gert was made redundant from Pye in Cambridge in 1946, but after some anxious months, managed to find a better one, more suited to his talents. However, it was in Aldermaston, and he was only able to come home every third weekend, leaving Dodo to manage the children (with paid help), the factory and Gert's elderly parents. Money was still tight for the family, which caused much anxiety. After two and a half years, when Dodo sold the factory in 1949, she and the children were at last able to move to Aldermaston in 1950, and they were reunited as a family.

Life in Aldermaston was pleasant in some ways, but quite isolated. The family lived in a converted army hut which was poorly insulated from heat or cold. The children had to travel ten miles to school in Newbury. Dodo spent much of her time as the family driver to the nearest public transport. Housework was not enough for Dodo, and she was bored. So Dodo and Gert worked their way to buying a house in the nearest large town, Reading.

When they started looking at houses, none met their satisfaction, so they bought a plot of land and an armful of architecture books, and designed their house completely, also supervising the building. It had four bedrooms, all but one south-facing, back-to-back bookcases for the children's bedrooms, a porch big enough to contain a table and chairs, a small study for Gert, a garage, three outhouses, and a large garden in which they preserved many of the trees of the former woodland. They started the process in 1953 and moved into the house in December 1954.

With the children now older, Dodo wanted to work again, in an experimental field, but also to study psychology. She enrolled at Reading University and had completed most of the first year when she fell ill, and had to take a break. Then Gert died suddenly of a heart attack in June 1956. Dodo had to give up her psychology course and immediately look for a job. She started work as a maths lecturer at Reading Technical College in September 1956, and continued until her retirement in 1968.

One unexpected outcome of Gert's death was that Dodo at last found her nephew Henry **[cross-refer to his biography on Stolpersteine website?]**. Dodo knew he had come to England on the Kindertransport but had missed him when he came through London. She had tried to find him several times, but without success. News of Gert's death somehow reached Dodo's sister's best friend, who had also escaped from Germany and lived in Leicester. It turned out that her son knew Henry, so the circle could be completed. Dodo and Henry met in 1961, when he was 29. Dodo built a special bond with Henry and his family (wife and three children) for the rest of her life.

Dodo suffered from ill health for much of her life, necessitating several big operations and recuperation periods. Late in life she was able to claim compensation from the German government reparation scheme, both for her ill health and for her loss of career due to Nazi oppression. For the first time in her life, she experienced financial security, which enabled her to pay for the help she now needed. She enjoyed travel to warm climates, where she could enjoy swimming, but she resolutely avoided Germany, and also Germans if she met them while on holiday.

After her retirement in 1968, Dodo moved from Reading to London to be near old friends, and to see more of her adult children as they passed through London. With the help of her daughter, she completed her memoirs in 1977: *We Kept Our Heads: Personal memories of being Jewish in Nazi Germany and making a new home in England*. She had hoped to undertake voluntary work, but her poor health made this impossible. However, she enjoyed a new hobby of pottery, and took a keen interest in her children's and her three grandchildren's activities. She died on 5 November 1989 while on a visit to her daughter in Bristol, where her funeral was held. She was cremated and her ashes taken to

Reading to lie alongside those of her husband Gert. Later a memorial meeting for her was held in London, at which all who attended were encouraged to take home a piece of Dodo's pottery.

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