

Obituary - Dr. Walter Zander

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Walter Zander, who has died aged 95, was a unique institution in postwar Anglo-Jewry, writes Jon Kimche.

As secretary of the Friends of the Hebrew University from 1944-70, he used his office as a springboard not only to raise urgently needed funds for the university on a level not previously achieved but, even more, to spread the academic range of the university.

He was more concerned with achievement than with publicity and he enjoyed the personal support of Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, during his years of often uphill struggle to introduce African, Asian and Arab studies - and students - to the Hebrew University. In those early days, Anglo-Jewry, American Jewry and Israelis had more pressing priorities for Israel.

But Walter Zander persevered with incomparable tact and natural charm supported by his profoundly knowledgeable background of all that was best in the German-Jewish liberal culture, he had acquired as an eminent Zionist lawyer in Berlin.

When he came with his young family to England in the 1930s, he first set up a printing business outside London but then suffered internment on the Isle of Man. His appointment as secretary of the Friends of the Hebrew University drew on his

scholarship and wide talents. His influence was founded as much on example as on persuasion.

His counsel was sought increasingly and always given discreetly. After retiring at 72 to devote himself to study and writing, he became a Hebrew University governor and a senior associate fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford.

Often critical of Israeli policies towards the Arabs, but never of Israel, his greatest achievement was perhaps his ability to understand positions with which he deeply disagreed.

He became one of the foremost authorities on Israel's holy places. his book on "Israel and the Holy Places of Christendom" has become a standard history of a very complex topic.

Despite his blindness in later years, he maintained his interest in his life's work to the last.

Predeceased by his wife, Gretl, in 1968, he is survived by three sons, a daughter and grandchildren.