



Maurice Myer Greenside Prince (1899 - 1991)

Entertainment entrepreneur and co-founder of the Strand Cinema, Kingsley Road, Bideford

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A full version of Louise's research on Maurice Prince can be accessed [here](#).

Note to readers:

Our research files have been compiled by a committed and diligent team of volunteer researchers.

Please be aware that while our volunteers have received training in basic research skills, they are not professional historians.

We welcome further use of our research-files (with due credit). However, we encourage you to perform your own fact-checking / research processes before relying on any of the information contained here.

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Maurice Myer Greenside Prince (1899–1991), who was of Jewish heritage, moved from west London to North Devon in the 1930s.

His love of the cinema led him to found the Strand Cinema on the Pill in Bideford in 1938, a year after he opened the Regal cinema on the Strand in Barnstaple.

He was also Devon's Information Officer and a civil defence warden during the war.

In her book The Jews in North Devon during the Second World War (Tiverton, Halsgrove, 2005), Dr Helen Fry describes how Maurice helped Jewish refugees who were escaping from Nazi persecution. He sheltered them in the dressing rooms of his cinemas until they could find somewhere to live.

'Because of the risk of public opposition, opinion being mixed on the question of German refugees, the work remained largely secret. It appears that, apart from his immediate family, only two people were told about his work – the chief projectionist at the Regal Cinema in

Barnstaple, Joe Trapnell, who aided Maurice in this work, and his doctor. Mr Trapnell's niece, Mary Curry, recounts:

"... I saw a lady holding the hand of a little girl. She wore a felt hat and feather. She was not local. Most women who came to market in the 1930s wore cloche or 'flower-pot' hats. Her hat and style was very different. That is when I was aware of people in the town who could speak no English. Mr Prince would give money to help them out. These must have been the German-Jewish refugees who were often around the town. Joe asked my mother to keep the matter secret, which we did. (Interview, July 2002)"

Maurice also befriended and supported the multicultural United States armed forces who were stationed at Bowden Green during the war.

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An artist's impression of the soon-to-be-built Strand Cinema in December 1937. (Courtesy of Torridge District Council)



Illustration in Peter Christie, Secret Bideford (15 June 2015, Amberley Publishing Limited)



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The Strand Cinema on The Pill in 1980, shortly before it closed.

Maurice's mother's maiden name was Phoebe Phillips. Her family originated in Eastern Europe and Russia, and were founding members of the Jewish community in the Hampshire garrison town of Aldershot in the 1860s. At first, services and ceremonies were held at the premises of Maurice's great-grandfather Moses, who was a pawnbroker at 14 High Street. A permanent synagogue was established in 1901 at 1 Barrack Road.

In the 1939 census, Maurice is recorded as a 'Managing Director of Cinema Companies', staying at the Imperial Hotel in Barnstaple. Phoebe is with him, as well as his sister Amelia Krusin, whose occupation is noted as 'unpaid domestic work'(!). A tea party and a gift of chrysanthemums was organised by the cinema staff for Mrs Phoebe Prince's 80th birthday party, reported in the *North Devon Journal* on 5 November 1942. Phoebe passed away in Barnstaple in 1951, aged 88.

Maurice's Jewish father Nathaniel, born in 1870, had emigrated from Zborow in Galicia, now western Ukraine. Nathaniel, like thousands of other Eastern Europeans from the 1880s onwards, emigrated in search of a better life and to escape poverty and pogroms (persecution and killings of Jewish communities in the region). He was a merchant, financial agent and commercial traveller, naturalized British in 1913, when Maurice was 12. In his 40s, he is recorded on passenger lists travelling between Plymouth, Liverpool and New York – with more than one transatlantic voyage in 1916.

Maurice himself remained unmarried. He lived at the Grade II Listed 'Strand House', Ashford, near Barnstaple, a beautiful spot overlooking the Taw Estuary across to Fremington. Another 'Strand' – the word originating from the Old English/Germanic name for the edge of a river, border or beach - in this context, of the Rivers Taw and Torridge.

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I have not yet managed to trace any members of Maurice's extended family. The tribute on his headstone describes him as 'One of nature's gentlemen'. The Hebrew script reads: 'Here buried', and 'May his soul be bundled in the bundle of life'. Although 30 years have elapsed since he was laid to rest in Golder's Green cemetery, perhaps there are people with family, friendship or professional connections who would like to get in touch to share further information. We would love to hear from you.