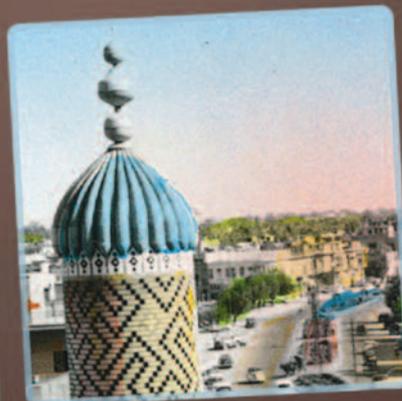




A SPRING FILMS AND ECHODOCS PRODUCTION

# REMEMBER BAGHDAD

IRAQ'S LAST JEWS TELL THE STORY OF THEIR COUNTRY



“JEWS, MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS – WE WERE ALL IRAQIS – IT WAS PARADISE”

ساویر الاولاد القاصرين



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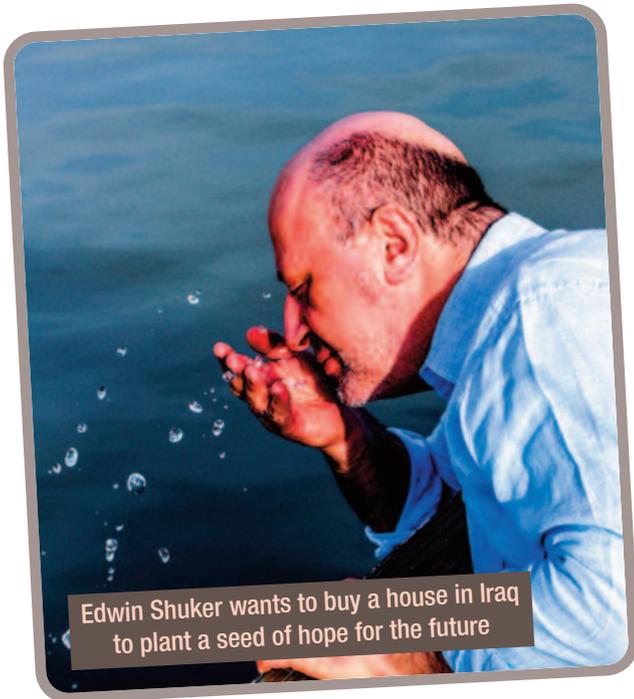
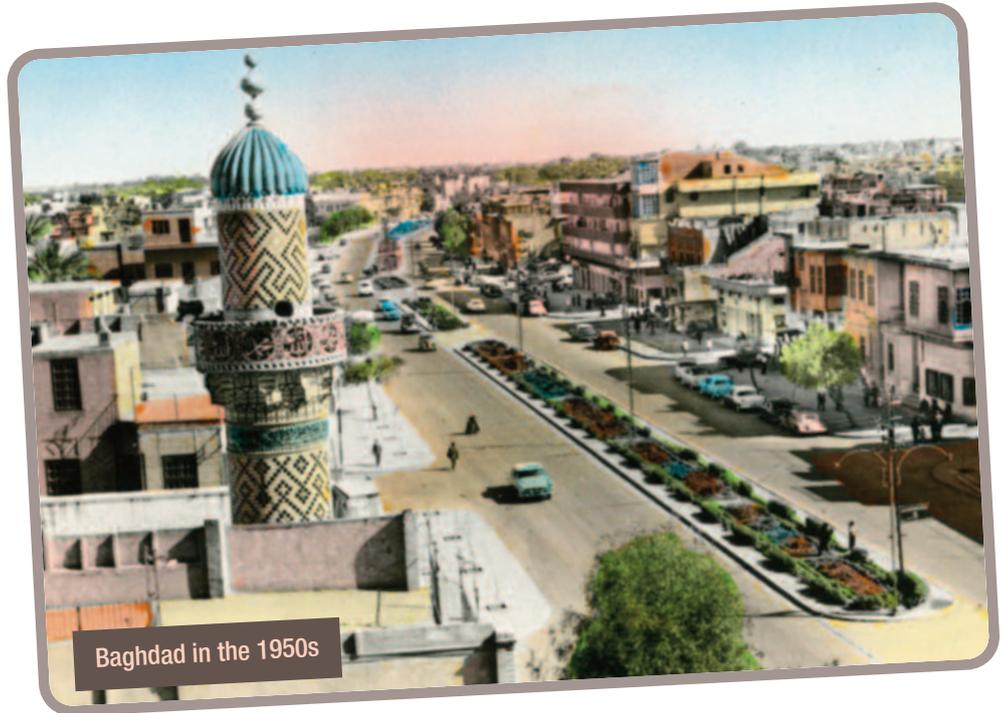
[www.vimeo.com/198711108](http://www.vimeo.com/198711108)

# INTRODUCTION

Iraq's last Jews tell the story of their country

On the hundredth anniversary of the British invasion in 1917, Remember Baghdad is the untold story of Iraq, an unmissable insight into how the country developed from a completely new perspective – through the eyes of the Jews who lived there for 2,600 years until only a generation ago.

With vivid home movies and archive news footage, eight characters tell their remarkable stories, of fun that was had, and the fear that followed as Iraq laid foundations for decades of unrest. Amid the country's instability today we follow one Iraqi Jew on a journey home, back to Baghdad.



The story begins in a happy period for the Jews. In 1917 a third of the citizens of Baghdad are Jewish. The descendants of the scholars who wrote the Babylonian Talmud are now westernising fast. In 1947 the first Miss Baghdad is Jewish. Jews are parliamentarians. They attend fancy parties and picnics on the Tigris with the elite.

But after the creation of Israel they are no longer safe. A mass exodus takes place, though many thousands stay behind, loyal to the country they love. Finally, after 1967, Saddam Hussein mobilises a mass movement against them and they must flee.

Our characters tell their story with poignant regret and bitter clarity.

# THE FILM



In 1947 Renée Dangoor was crowned Miss Baghdad in the country's first beauty contest

Five families from the Jewish community look back on a scarcely imaginable time in Baghdad – Iraq was booming, it was pleasure-seeking, and there was inter-communal trust. Iraq was once one of the most diverse places on earth, more tolerant of its minorities than any European nation.

Today, after decades of war and instability, Iraq is a very different place. In spite of the danger, North Londoner, Edwin Shuker, decides to return to the country he loved. We follow him back to Baghdad. He wants to buy a house in Iraq so that he can say “the Jews have not all gone”. He wants to plant a seed of hope for the future.

At the start of this story, the 2,600 year-old Jewish community is flourishing, with ministers in government, officers in the army and invitations to the best parties. We meet the Dangoor family in 1947, just as Renée Dangoor is crowned “Miss Baghdad” in the country’s first beauty contest. She and her husband are set to become part of Baghdad’s elite. But after the creation of Israel in 1948 everything changes.

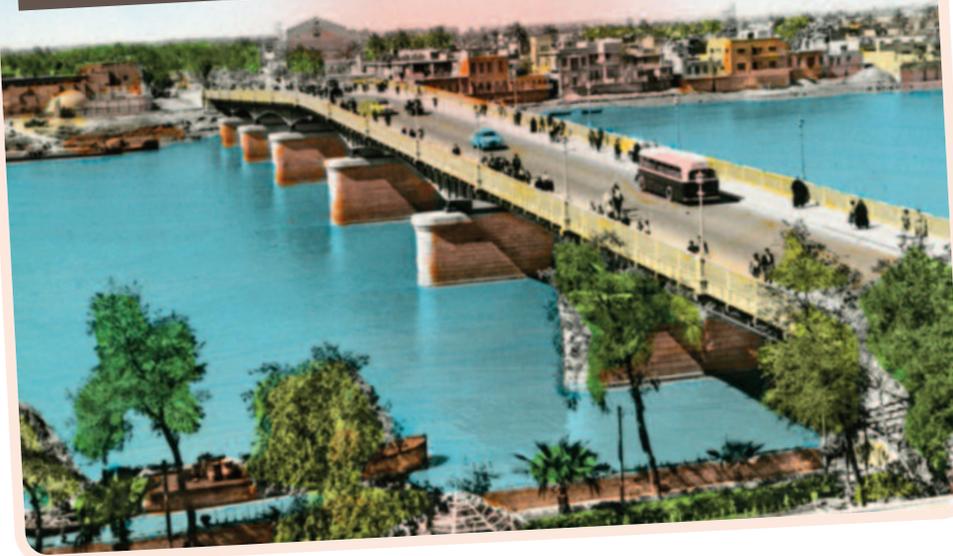
Within a few years of Renée’s triumph, the atmosphere is ugly. Family by family, the Jewish community observe events on the streets and the politics of the Middle East, constantly wondering whether to leave. Families make different political judgements and different decisions, but by 1951 120,000 Iraqi Jews abandon their homes to fly six-hundred miles West to Tel Aviv.

Despite this dramatic departure, seven thousand Jews remain. In a seemingly golden period of royal patronage, society balls and picnics on the banks of the Tigris, life in Baghdad was once again, deceptively secure.



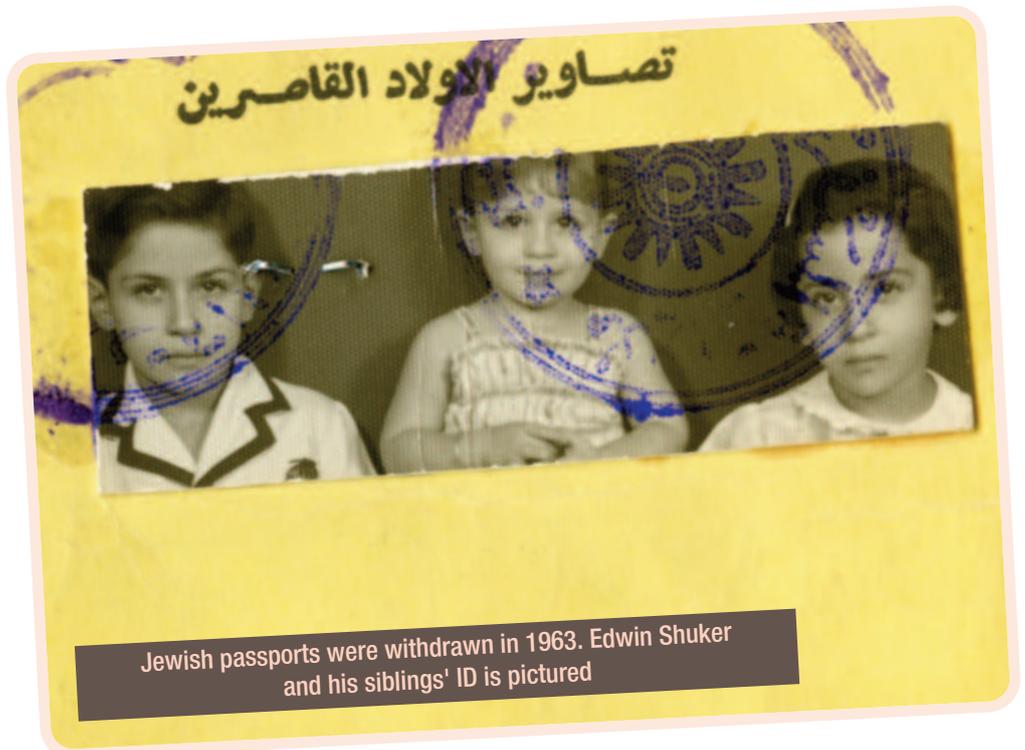
120,000 Iraqi Jews abandoned their homes to fly six-hundred miles West to Tel Aviv

Naim Dangoor worked as an engineer on the King Faisal II Bridge, completed by British contractors in 1937



Using a unique archive of powerful home movies and photos, alongside public source news footage, we meet the Dallals who import tyres, the Khalastchis who sell cars, the Shamashes who are property developers and politicians, and the Dangoors who import Coca-Cola – all working in partnerships with Muslims. In a busy, nation-building period, it seemed to them that Babylon would remain a centre of Jewish life. Once it was the pre-eminent centre of learning in the Jewish world – it was hard to imagine it could come to an end. They paid the price of their overconfidence.

The arc of their lives goes from unbounded optimism to terrified escape. We follow our characters as their lives expand under the puppet regime installed by the British, as they survive a Nazi-inspired coup in 1941, the creation of Israel in 1948, the massacre of the Royal family in 1958 and the arrival of the Ba'ath Party in 1963 and the catastrophic consequences of the Six Day War with Israel in 1967. Through wars and coups Iraq distorts, under internal and international pressure. The story of Baghdad's last Jews – from gaiety to revolutions, public hangings and murder – opens out onto the wider story of Iraq.



Jewish passports were withdrawn in 1963. Edwin Shuker and his siblings' ID is pictured

Filmmaker Fiona Murphy's intimate interviews, personal viewpoint, extensive personal and news archive as well as footage from Iraq today, reveal the little-known but fascinating back story of how the disintegration began in a country that has exploded into our lives today.

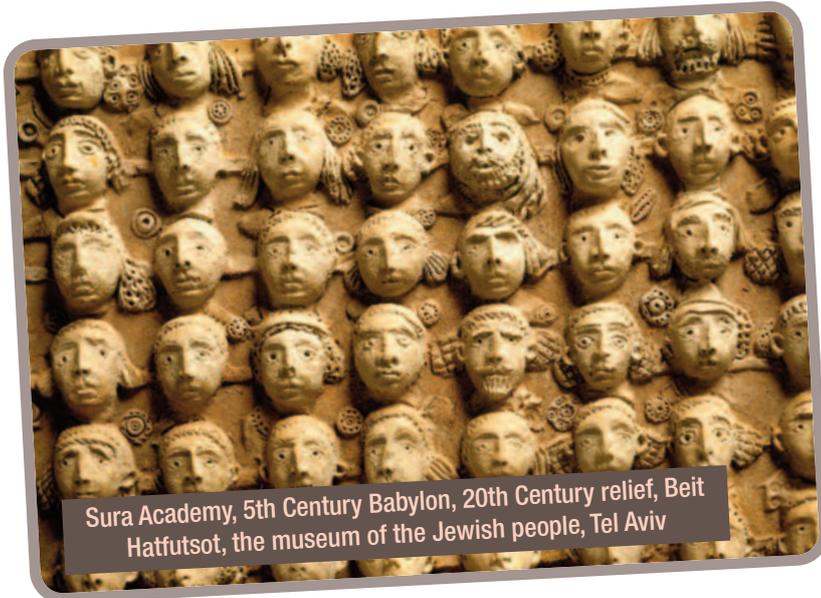
# TIMELINE

- 597BC** King Nebuchadnezzar captures the Jews and takes them to Babylon
- 2–5 CE** Writing of the Babylonian Talmud
- 1534–1918** Modern day Iraq becomes part of the Ottoman Empire
- 1917** Britain seizes control of Baghdad during the First World War to control its oil reserves – 100th anniversary in 2017
- 1921** Britain creates the state of Iraq, binds three politically separate provinces into one and appoints a monarchy to rule under a British Mandate
- 1932** Iraq becomes an independent state – 85th anniversary in 2017  
Iraq signs an oil deal with Britain
- 1941** Britain reoccupies Iraq after a Nazi-inspired coup. Anti-Jewish and anti-British feeling is building due to the British support for a plan to create a Jewish state within Palestine.
- 1948** The creation of Israel, followed by the Arab-Israeli War. Iraq joins Arab forces. The Arab campaign is unsuccessful.
- 1948–1951** The public reaction in Iraq is angry. The government participates in a punitive domestic reaction. American Zionists finance an exodus for the Jews of Iraq. Over 120,000 Iraqi Jews emigrate to Israel. Seven thousand remain in Iraq.
- 1958** The monarchy is overthrown in a military coup, the king is assassinated and Iraq is declared a republic, marking the end of British influence. Four thousand Jews remain.
- 1963–1968** The Ba'ath Party seizes power, leading to a succession of coups.  
Jewish passports are withdrawn.
- 1967** Six-Day War: Iraq joins Arab forces in an unsuccessful war against Israel.  
Jews in Iraq are excluded from government jobs, universities, and the possibility of working as their bank accounts are closed. They are not allowed to use telephones and the media run frequent stories about a 'Fifth Column of Jewish spies'.
- 1969** Nine Jews are hanged in a big public occasion in Baghdad after a show trial. Jews are arrested. Some disappear and nearly 100 are executed.
- 1979** Saddam Hussein becomes President
- 1980–1988** Iran-Iraq war
- 1990** Iraq invades Kuwait, and is expelled by Allied Forces in 1991
- 2003** US-led coalition invades, starting years of warfare and instability

In Baghdad's Sadr City lies a cemetery of 4,000 Jewish tombs and graves. Edwin Shuker's grandfather is buried here



# HISTORY



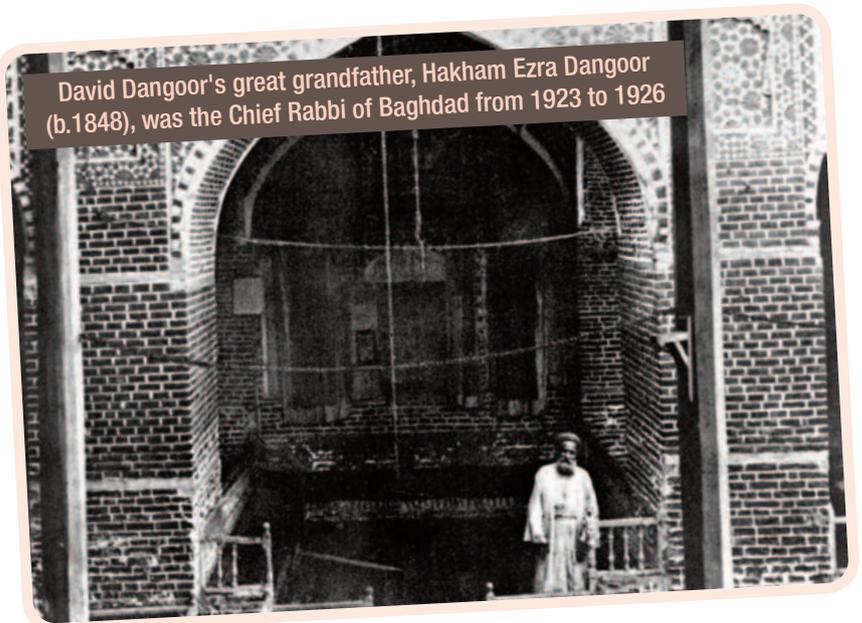
Sura Academy, 5th Century Babylon, 20th Century relief, Beit Hatfutsot, the museum of the Jewish people, Tel Aviv

Iraq's rich history is as diverse as the country's many names – Babylon, Shinar, Chaldea, Al-Jazireh, Mesopotamia, Iraq. It's also a history of many people, including the Jews who lived there for 2,600 years, until only a generation ago. Iraqi Jews constitute one of the world's oldest and most historically-significant Jewish communities.

This Jewish community first settled around 586 BCE when Judah was defeated by King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar captured the Jews and took them to Babylon as slaves. In turn, less than half a century later, the kingdom was conquered by the Persians – the Jews were allowed to return to Judea, but most preferred to remain.

From the Babylonian period until the twentieth century, Iraq thrived as a centre of Jewish learning. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, the kingdom took in many refugees from current day Israel and became the centre of decision making in Jewish affairs. Christianity reached Mesopotamia in the first century AD and the religions lived side by side.

The Babylonian academies were at their height in the third century AD, which marked the beginning of a new era for the Jews. This was when they established the style of learning found in the Talmud, a book of legal scholarship with folk stories, jokes, debates and disagreements in which every imaginable topic is covered, from legal debate, theology and music to trapping mice.



David Dangoor's great grandfather, Hakham Ezra Dangoor (b.1848), was the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad from 1923 to 1926

Around this time, Upper Mesopotamia came to be known as Al-Jazirah in Arabic (which means "The Island", in reference to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers), while Lower Mesopotamia came to be known as Iraq-i (meaning "the land of the Arabs").

Islam arrived in the 630s and the Jewish community became part of the Muslim caliphate. The city of Baghdad was built in the 8th century and soon became the primary centre of the Muslim world during the centuries of the Islamic Golden Age. All minorities had to pay a poll tax and experienced some discrimination, but as "people of the book", the Jews had a large and well-regulated place in society.



Victorious British soldiers look across the Tigris at Baghdad, 1941



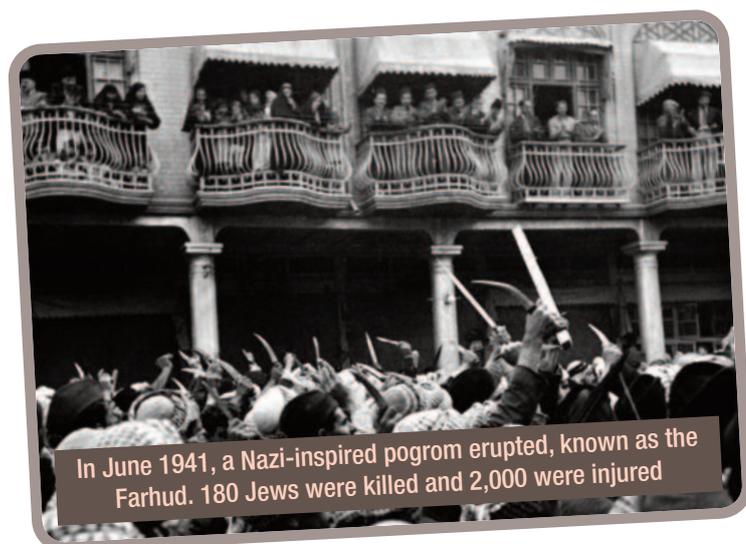
The Jewish community survived the Mongol invasions of the Middle Ages and fared well under the Ottoman Empire (1533–1918). The community established modern schools in the second half of the 19th century with funding from French philanthropists.

After the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was divided up and the British Mandate of Mesopotamia was established by the League of Nations, later to be called Iraq. A war of rebellion consumed vast resources and set the people of Iraq against one another. But Winston Churchill was determined to hang onto the territory, keenly aware of how much oil was needed to power a fleet and that Britain would benefit from controlling an open trade route to India.

In 1921, Britain imposed a Hashemite monarchy on Iraq and defined the country's territorial limits. After hundreds of years as institutionalised second-class subjects, the Jews started to play an important role in running the country. The first minister of finance was a Jew, Sassoon Eskell. However, this drove a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims. The minorities were regarded as instruments of European policy.



After 1932, the British mandate officially ended, making Iraq the only independent Middle Eastern country. It became a magnet for Arab intellectual dissidents and especially a large contingent of Palestinian teachers, who took refuge in Baghdad. They moved the climate of opinion and attitudes hardened towards the British, with their hold on Iraqi oil and their backing for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Iraq's own monarchy was generally seen as a puppet regime serving the British.



In this atmosphere, the German Nazi party courted the opposition. *Mein Kampf* was translated into Arabic, radio propaganda from Berlin blared in market places comparing Jews with worms, and the slogan "Allah in Heaven and Hitler on the ground" became familiar. Most significantly of all, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem – whose campaigns of violent popular resistance against the proposed Jewish State in Palestine were funded by the Nazis – came to Baghdad to inspire politicians and train young men.

Following a coup in 1941, driven by Nazi sympathisers, a skeleton British operation was mounted and succeeded in taking back the country. The king was reinstated, much to the fury of those who thought they had got rid of the imperialists. The Jews were seen as British sympathisers and a vicious riot against the community followed – the Farhud (which roughly translates to mean "the violent dispossession"); 180 were killed and 2,000 were injured in this two-day massacre, known as Baghdad's Kristallnacht.

The Jews of Baghdad never entirely regained their confidence although peace and prosperity returned to Iraq while the war raged elsewhere. And Jewish fears were realized when in 1948, Iraq joined the Arab League states that went to war to stop the creation of Israel. When they lost, both ordinary people and officials again turned their fury on the Jews at home. It became very frightening for a year or more.

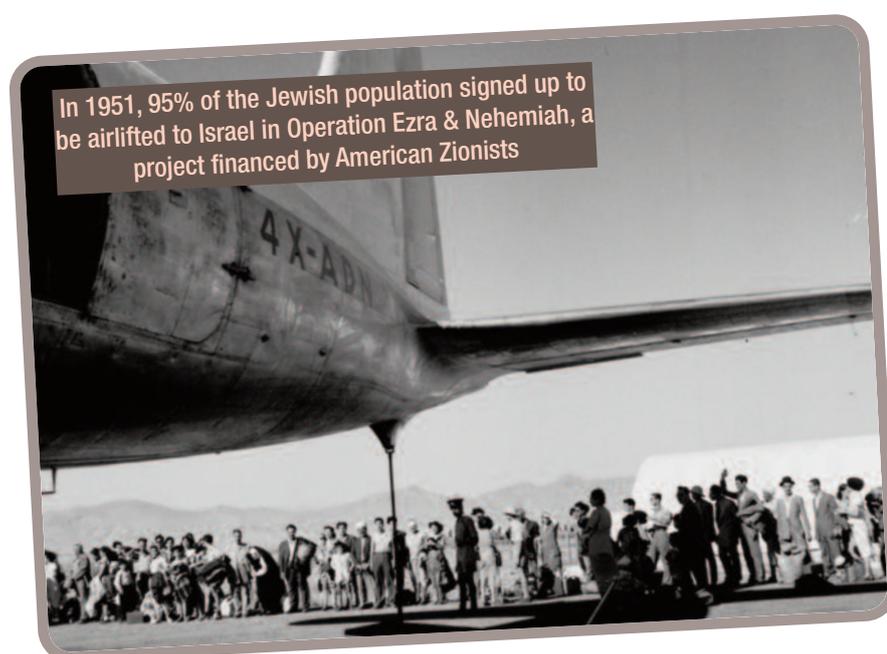
In spite of the fact that tempers had settled by 1950, in 1951, 95% of the Jewish population (120,000–130,000) signed up to be airlifted to Israel in Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, a project financed largely by American Zionists.



During the 1930s, the German Nazi party courted opposition to the British in Iraq

The Iraqi Jews had until that point been largely indifferent to Zionism. Early Zionism mostly concentrated on the Jews of Europe, ignoring the Iraqi (indeed all Sephardi) Jews. The indifference was mutual. Iraqis were not interested in the agricultural ideals of the settlers, and the Ashkenazi (European) Jews were snobbish about Jews from the Middle East.

After the Holocaust however, there was a numbers crisis in Israel and emissaries were sent to Baghdad to encourage the young to emigrate illegally. It was thought that if the young went, the families would follow.

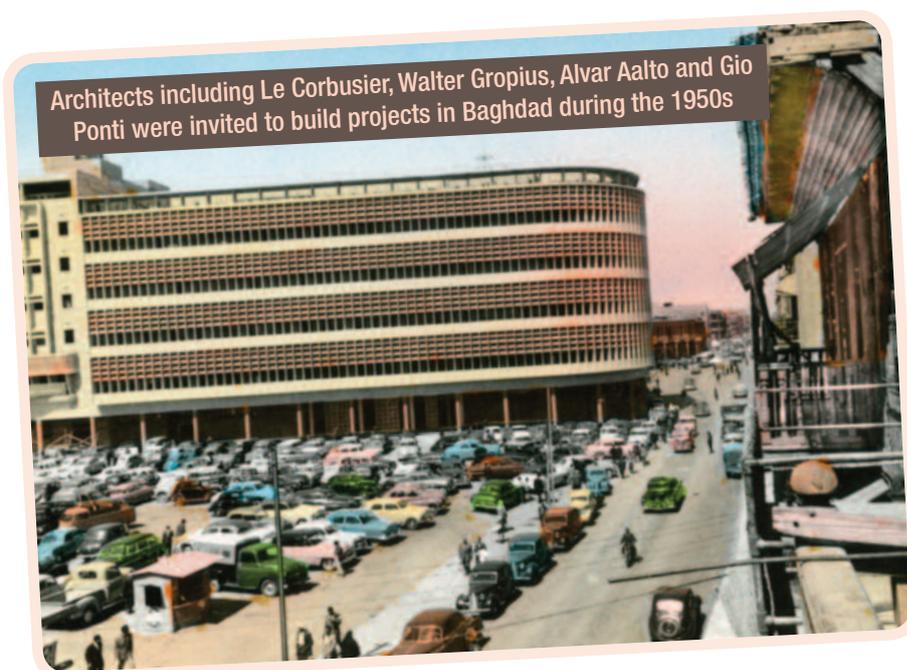


In 1951, 95% of the Jewish population signed up to be airlifted to Israel in Operation Ezra & Nehemiah, a project financed by American Zionists

The campaign was successful. Money was raised, Iraqi politicians were paid off and the initially reluctant population signed up en masse.

Terrorist bombs started going off in Jewish districts of Baghdad, and there has been controversy ever since about whether the bombs were actually set off by Zionists anxious to get the population moving.

The immigrant Iraqis lived in tents outside Tel Aviv, some for many years and with that gloomy prospect, there were 7,000 who had the contacts and money enough to feel confident in Baghdad and they stayed on to enjoy the boom years of the fifties. Architects like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto and Gio Ponti were invited to build projects. Consumerism arrived.



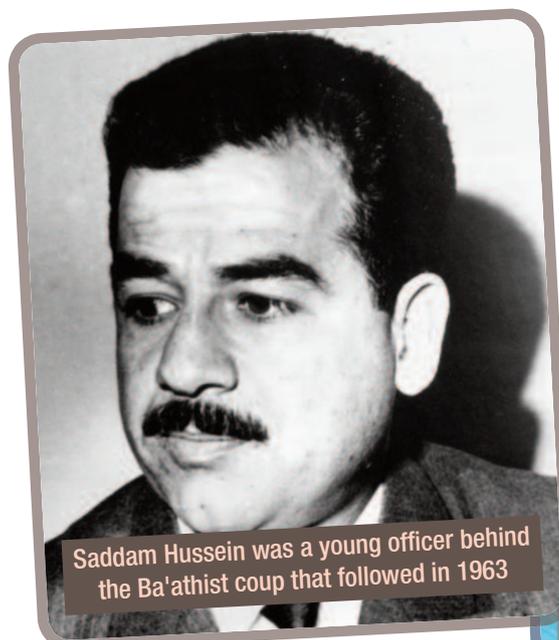
Architects including Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto and Gio Ponti were invited to build projects in Baghdad during the 1950s

Then in 1958 the monarchy was overthrown in a military coup and the king was assassinated. Iraq was declared a republic, marking the end of British influence. Despite the instability, the new ruler was benign towards minority groups and 4,000 Jews remained in Baghdad.

This calm would last just five years, until a Ba'athist coup followed in 1963. Saddam Hussein was a young officer at the time, following in the footsteps of his uncle and mentor, Khairallah Talfah, who had participated in the Nazi-inspired coup of 1941. Now, amid talk of an Israeli "fifth column", Jewish passports were taken away.



The 1950s were a seemingly golden period for Iraq's remaining Jews. Life in Baghdad was deceptively secure



Saddam Hussein was a young officer behind the Ba'athist coup that followed in 1963

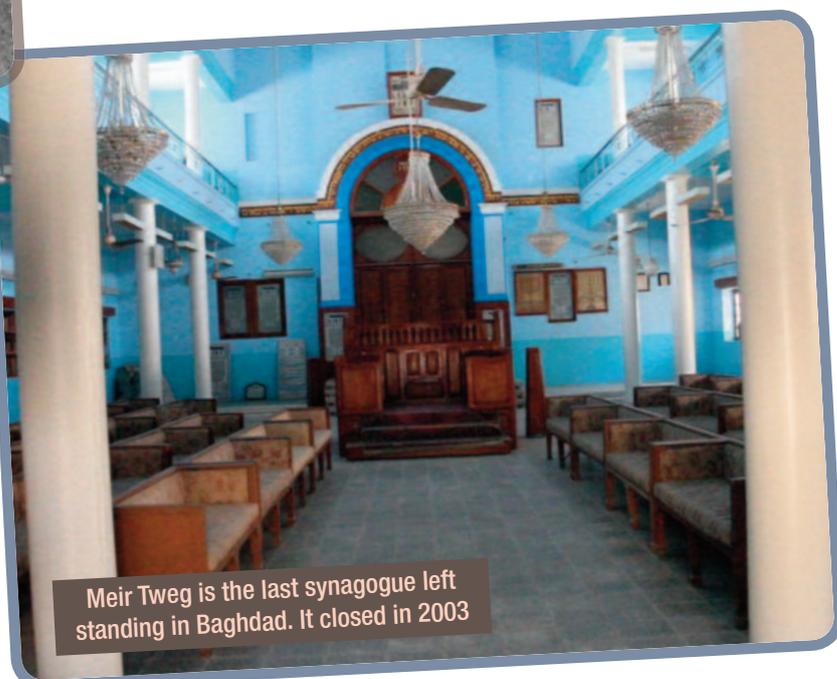
In 1967, Iraq joined the Arab forces fighting Israel in the Six Day War. When they lost, there were reprisals in Iraq. The 2,000 Jews remaining in the country were unable to work, many living under house arrest. Their telephones were removed and street attacks became frequent. After another coup, bringing al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein his Deputy back to power, Jews started to be rounded up as spies.

In January 1969 Saddam Hussein was put in charge of a spectacular event for which hundreds of thousands of people were bussed from all over the country to attend – the hanging of 13 men accused of spying for Israel. Iraqi citizens paraded and danced past the scaffolds.

As soon as the war with the Kurds ended in 1970, a route out opened up. Jewish families started running away over the mountains to Iran. By 1974 there were only 280 Jews left and the tension eased. The Iraqi government allowed Jews to get passports and leave. In the 1980s Saddam Hussein was pressured by the Americans to protect the remaining community and a department within the Ministry of National Security was set up to ensure their safety.

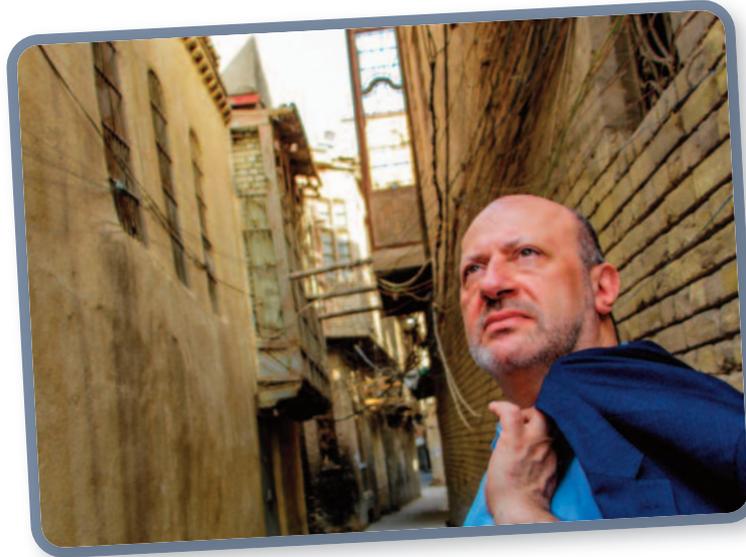
In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Jewish Agency launched an effort to track down all remaining Iraqi Jews and present them with an opportunity to emigrate to Israel.

Today there are only five Jews known to live in Baghdad.



Meir Tweg is the last synagogue left standing in Baghdad. It closed in 2003

# CONTRIBUTORS



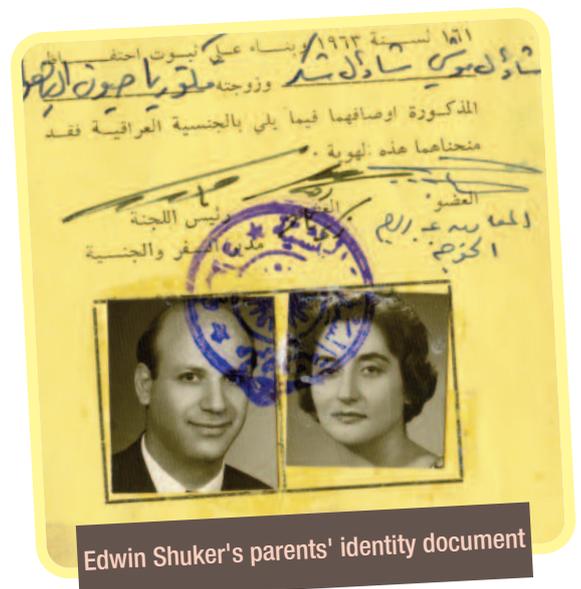
## Edwin Shuker

*“Baghdad was the centre of the Jewish world for over 1,500 years. My ancestors wrote the Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud. They invested so much in Iraq ... I can't live with the fact that my grandfather is buried here and that we've abandoned him and we are just saying Goodbye Baghdad... Goodbye everything, and we no longer even look back...”*

At the opening of the documentary, Edwin leaves his family behind in safe suburban North London, prepared to risk his life to rekindle a Jewish presence in the country of his birth. In 1951, when most of the Jews fled to Israel, Edwin's parents remained and continued to live a comfortable happy life. But like gamblers, he says, they overplayed their hand. In 1971 he and his family were fortunate to escape from Saddam Hussein's regime with their lives.

Now it is perilous for everyone and Edwin's childhood home in Baghdad's Battaween district is in a particularly dangerous part of the city. But Edwin is determined to keep his connection to the place alive.

He has decided to buy a house in Iraq. It will be in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish area in the North East corner of the country. The Islamic State frontier is just a short drive away. But Edwin dreams that one day, just maybe, in 30, 40, 50 or 60 years' time, the Jews of Iraq will be able to reconnect with their ancestral birthplace. If he doesn't see this dream in his lifetime, at least he will know he set it in motion.



Edwin Shuker's parents' identity document



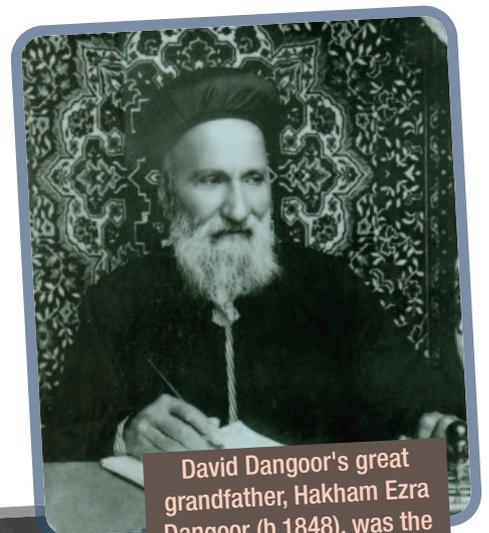
## David Dangoor

*“Iraq is still in our blood, in our bones. It’s like a distant bell ringing in the back of our heads, always reminding us where we came from.”*

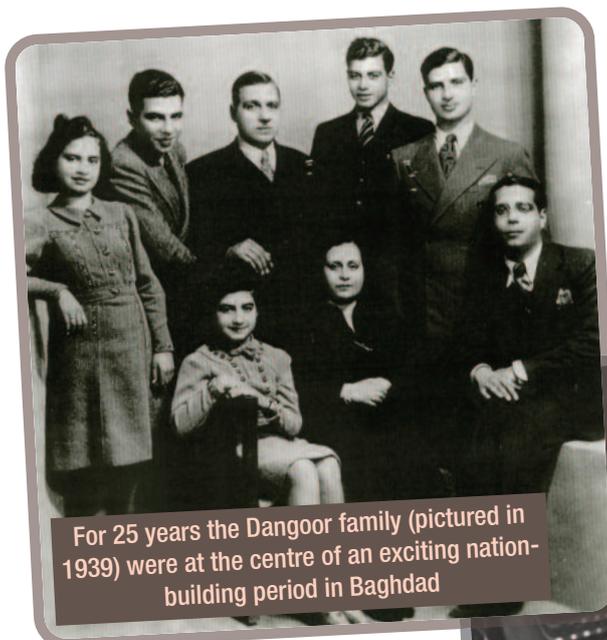
David was born in 1948, the same year that Israel was created. The new Israeli state marked the beginning of the end for Jews in Iraq. The Jewish community was plunged into crisis and instability, but nevertheless the Dangoors believed that the atmosphere would improve. The family had close Muslim friends, contacts in government, a good life – they felt secure. They seemed to have the best of everything. For 25 years they had been at the centre of an exciting nation-building period when Baghdad was transformed from a sleepy Ottoman city into the commercial hub of a British-dominated, oil driven new country. David’s mother was crowned the first ever “Miss Baghdad”.

David grew up secure and happy in his grandfather’s villa by the Tigris. Business was booming. His family attended fancy parties and rubbed shoulders with the royal family and government ministers. They could not imagine that their lifestyle would come to an end. But in 1958 the British-

installed monarchy was overthrown, and their confidence was crushed. David’s parents finally made the decision to leave Iraq. They were among the last to get out without risking their lives.



David Dangoor's great grandfather, Hakham Ezra Dangoor (b.1848), was the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad from 1923 to 1926



For 25 years the Dangoor family (pictured in 1939) were at the centre of an exciting nation-building period in Baghdad



The Dangoors attended fancy parties and picnics on the Tigris with the elite



## Eileen Khalastchy – David Dangoor's aunt

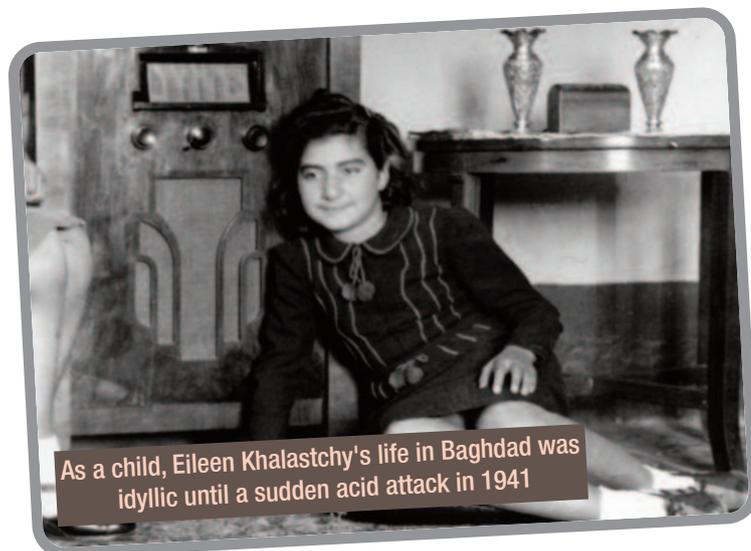
*"Jews, Muslims and Christians, we [were] all Iraqis. It was a good time... I still miss Baghdad."*

In 1974 Eileen was among the last few hundred Jews to flee Baghdad, leaving just 280 behind. She had seen the country through British rule, independence, revolutions, war with Israel and persecution under the Ba'ath Party.

As a child, Eileen's life in Baghdad was idyllic. She misses it still and stayed in Iraq as long as she could. The first sign of change was when the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem moved into the house next door to her home. In 1941 she was too young to understand the reason for the sudden acid attack on her on the riverbank of the Tigris, that the politics of Palestine/Israel and the influence of the Nazis was behind the frightening change of atmosphere in Baghdad. But anger over the British re-conquest of Iraq and the partition of Palestine was building up and it soon led to violent attacks against the Jews in Baghdad.



In 1974 Eileen Khalastchy was among the last few hundred Jews to flee Baghdad



As a child, Eileen Khalastchy's life in Baghdad was idyllic until a sudden acid attack in 1941

Eileen and her family ignored all opportunities to leave until suddenly, it was almost too late. By the late 1960s, their lives were in danger, their passports withdrawn; and two or three families were escaping every week. Nevertheless, today she remembers the good times, always smiling.



## David Khalastchi – Eileen Khalastchy's cousin-in-law

*“No difference between Muslims, Jewish, Christian and all the minorities. Iraq for all Iraqis.”*

Ninety-year-old David's love of horses goes back to his childhood growing up in the countryside two hours south of Babylon. He still canters on his grey mare. Life took off for the Khalastchis after the British arrived in Iraq. His father was one of the few people who spoke English and thanks to strong relationships with the local tribes, the family were central to the development of agriculture in the area south of Baghdad.

By the late fifties, Iraq was swept up in a consumer revolution. David owned a car dealership selling large American cars. He expected financial ruin after the revolution of 1958, but instead, there was big demand from the new embassies representing Russia, China and Eastern interests. David had the best five years of his life. He paints an exuberant picture of his life in Baghdad, his Muslim friends, the fun they had and his sadness at having to leave in March 1967. He managed to get out when thousands of Jews were trapped without passports. Within three months the tension in the Middle East would develop into the Six Day War.

## Salim Fattal

*“The Jews did not understand what happened. Arab nationalists in Iraq, with the Mufti and the influence of the Nazis during the thirties, they are in danger. The Jews are in danger.”*

Broadcaster and writer Salim Fattal, who lives outside Jerusalem, pioneered Israel's Arabic language radio and television. He was born in Baghdad during British rule, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and before independence in 1932. His childhood in a poor neighbourhood of Baghdad was scarred by the murder of his uncle during ugly anti-Jewish riots in 1941. Nonetheless, he grew up identifying as equally with Jews as with the Arab communities around him.

In the late 1940s Salim joined a mixed community of communists. They campaigned to rid the country of the puppet regime installed by the British and to take back Iraqi oil from British operators. After the creation of Israel, Communism and Zionism both became capital offences and Salim fled to Israel, more out of fear of being punished as a communist than for a commitment to Zionism.

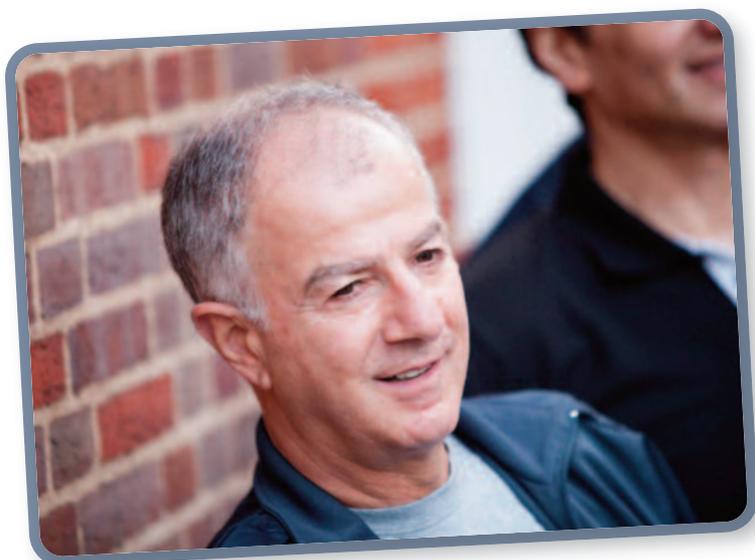




## Esperance Ben-Moshe

*"We were frightened to death. I was all night hearing the noises, the shouts in the air.... some iron falling, doors were breaking, people were shouting."*

Esperance was an impressionable young girl who hid on the roof with her family during the terrifying riot of 1941, Baghdad's Kristallnacht. Later, as the Jewish community started to organise their departure, she was delighted by the picnics and mysterious expeditions to the desert to learn Hebrew in the secret schools run by Zionists. Her family were not Zionists, but in an atmosphere of panic, they joined the airlift of 1951 when virtually the whole community was taken from Iraq to Israel. They fled with £10 in their pockets. Today she lives in Tel Aviv.



## Danny Dallal

*"You had this feeling that all eyes were upon you all the time. We can't afford to look like Jewish kids out on the street. So in the street we start speaking Muslim."*

Danny's father was the director of a company that imported tyres from Japan. His uncle – whom he loved dearly – owned a chocolate factory. The family lived the high life, mixing with Jews and Muslims at members' clubs established by the British for the elite, with tennis courts and cocktail bars.

But by the late 1960s the Jewish community was isolated and was thought to be harbouring a "fifth column" acting for Israel. People started disappearing; a few at a time, or in small groups, they vanished from their families. His uncle was arrested in the middle of the night. Six months later a notice in the paper announced that he had been found guilty of spying, and he was hanged.



## David Shamash – David Dangoor's neighbour

*“The [Second World] War hardly touched them. There were parties every night. The community was living in a bubble. They were not touched by the Holocaust and they were living as if there was no war and nothing has happened much.”*

David Shamash is David Dangoor's neighbour in London, as he was in Baghdad when they were children. Part of a prominent Baghdadi family, David's father became an Iraqi MP. Ministers would visit the Shamash home to have dinner and play cards. But after the Suez Crisis in 1956, there was a sense of anxiety bubbling under the surface of this easy-going life. After 1969 it was only the action of old friends in high places that protected the family from arrest and the trials that saw many members of the Jewish community hanged. In 1970, after years of living under threat, David's mother decided it was time for the family to escape over the mountains to Iran.



David Shamash's parents were part of a prominent Baghdadi family (pictured in 1953)



David Shamash with his father, who was an Iraqi MP



## Eli Amir

*"I long for Baghdad, for the river there, my Baghdad."*

Iraqi-born Eli has written several autobiographical novels about the conflicted Jewish community in Baghdad, loving their country but at times terrified for their lives. Eli's mother's best friend was their Arab neighbour. The two women breast-fed each other's children. This woman would later protect the family and save their lives.

Eli still misses the smells and sounds of Baghdad, but feels that there was no choice but to flee Iraq in the poisonous atmosphere that followed the creation of Israel. And now there was a country that welcomed them. The family left for the newly-created Israel in the airlift of 1951 and Eli now lives on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He became political advisor to the government on Arab affairs in the sixties.



## Freddy Khalastchy – Eileen Khalastchy's son

*"My parents stayed on. They didn't think they did anything wrong."*

Freddy Khalastchy was a child when the British-installed monarchy was overthrown in 1958. His parents decided to continue living in Baghdad under the new left-wing military leader, Abdul Karim Kassem. The political project seemed benign, and favoured a multi-cultural Iraq. Freddy's parents were happy at home. But after the Ba'ath Party took over in the first of a series of coups in 1963, Jewish passports were withdrawn and Iraq lurched towards a sectarian, militarised system. Now they were trapped. The Israeli victory in the Six Day War of 1967 had immediate and deadly consequences for the Jews of Baghdad. From then on life was dominated by news of arrests and trials; it was about trying to survive without being noticed.



## Zvooloon Hareli

*“Some said: we will be communists, we'll change the regime and then it will be better for the Jews. We said: No. We need to do everything we can to leave and get to Israel.”*

Zvooloon was only 15 when he joined the Zionist underground movement in Iraq. It was here that he learnt to speak Hebrew and helped to organise the emigration of thousands of Iraqi Jews to Palestine, before it became Israel. Zvooloon was trained to use arms so he could defend the district he was responsible for, and became secretary of the educational department of the Baghdad branch. In 1949, he smuggled himself out of Iraq and he now lives near Tel Aviv.



# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The lives of my parents' families closed down as the British Empire shattered: my father's community was thrown out of Ireland and my mother's fled Jamaica. I grew up in London, conscious that people suffer for the crimes of generations long gone.

So when I was between films and was offered a job cataloguing an extraordinary archive of early home movies belonging to an Iraqi-Jewish family, I responded vividly to the news that the Jews of Iraq did well under the British, and paid for it. The end of the British Empire was not the only strand that bound their stories together with mine. My mother's family was ethnically Jewish. And while that was where the historical similarities ended, the smiling faces in the archive and the stark fact that only five Jews remain in Iraq today, awakened my own sense of loss.

At first I just wanted to convey the pain of losing your home. It seemed important, now, right now, to push back at the narrowness of our news, dominated by discussion of economic migrants, desperate refugees and the difficulties of integrating immigrants. The older stories were laments about the pain of exile: "It's a Long Long Way to Tipperary", and "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept". I wanted to show that that migrants travel with heavy hearts, give them a voice, and bring back the world that was lost. I knew this must be my next film.

Bit by bit, I was also drawn into the turbulent history of Iraq before Saddam Hussein, infinitely more complex than I knew, and for which Britain and the US bear much of the responsibility. I learned that the Jews once made up a third of the population of Baghdad. They spoke to me of idyllic times, picnics by the Tigris, fancy dress parties and beauty pageants. It was difficult at first to reconcile it all with the brutal place Iraq has become today. I wanted to know, step by step, how this happened.

Their story opens onto everything that happened in the Middle East between the First World War and the Cold War fifty years later. A mosaic emerged telling the story of a nation under intense pressure, descending into darkness. I was surprised by the light moments and unexpected paradoxes: the Arab friends and business partners, the ambivalence about Israel, the genuine affection for home. "Jews, Muslims, Christians, we were all Iraqis" they said.

I pushed on, and ended up going to Iraq at the peak of the ISIS insurgency with a man determined to re-kindle the Jewish presence by returning to buy a home there himself.

Iraq rid itself of its corrupt monarchy but fell victim to a sequence of populist tyrants who built their power using ethnic hatred. The Jews, after thousands of years, were cast as "foreigners". Pawns, they were on the wrong side of a political story.

**Fiona Murphy**

# PRODUCTION TEAM

## **Fiona Murphy: Director & Camera**

Fiona trained at the BBC and worked at Granada and Third Eye before becoming a journalist. After reviewing films for Paper Magazine in New York, she freelanced in London, writing on design for The Guardian and The Financial Times amongst others. She returned to film making and her film The Other Irish Travellers ran as a Storyville on BBC4.

## **Ed Dallal: Producer**

In 2009, Ed produced Superstonic Sound: The Rebel Dread which was shown at over 40 international film festivals. He then co-founded the 3Film Group and remains a non-executive board member of the São Paulo based company. Ed completed the Documentary Campus Masterschool in 2011 and, a year later, he joined Spring Films where he has produced The Quest For The Holy Foreskin (Nat Geo/Arte), and Bollywood and Beyond: A Century of Indian Cinema with Sanjeev Bhaskar (BBC).

## **Mark Anderson: Co-Producer**

Producer at Echodocs, Mark Anderson spent ten years as a producer / director at the BBC and then at Granada, LWT, and Brook Lapping where he was producer/director of, amongst others, The End of Empire, Endgame in Ireland and Last of the Czars series. He has awards from BAFTA (Circuit 11 Miami), an Emmy (Marek), Peabody and awards from The Royal Television Society and the Broadcasting Guild.

## **André Singer: Executive Producer**

Executive Producer, André Singer was Editor of Disappearing World. He founded the award-winning documentary strand Fine Cut (now Storyville). He now runs Spring Films. André has been responsible for several hundred hours of factual programs and has been producer or executive producer of fourteen films with Werner Herzog. He directed Night Will Fall which was awarded the Focal Award, a Peabody Award, an Emmy, won best Documentary at the Moscow Jewish Film Festival, and the Royal Television Society Award for Historical Documentary. He is President of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

## **George Carey: Executive Producer**

Executive Producer George Carey created Newsnight, was Editor of BBC1's Panorama and founded Mentorn Media. He produced Question Time, and originated Channel 4's Unreported World strand. His awards include the Prix Italia, BAFTA, Grierson, Emmy, and Peabody. He has a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Royal Television Society. In 2007, he returned to film-making himself, and he has shot and directed several documentaries for BBC Storyville.

## **Patrick Dickinson: Story Editor**

Writer/Director Patrick Dickinson is the only European winner of a Student EMMY for Drama, along with a BAFTA US Special Jury Prize and was shortlisted for the 40th Student Academy Awards. He's a BAFTA 'Brit to Watch', and former BAFTA and Hollywood Foreign Press Association scholar. He trained at the AFI in Los Angeles where he was mentored in directing by Primetime Emmy and Peabody winner Mick Jackson and in screenwriting by Academy Award nominee Gill Dennis. He was also the youngest BBC trainee of his generation.

## **Molly Nyman: Composer**

# FURTHER READING

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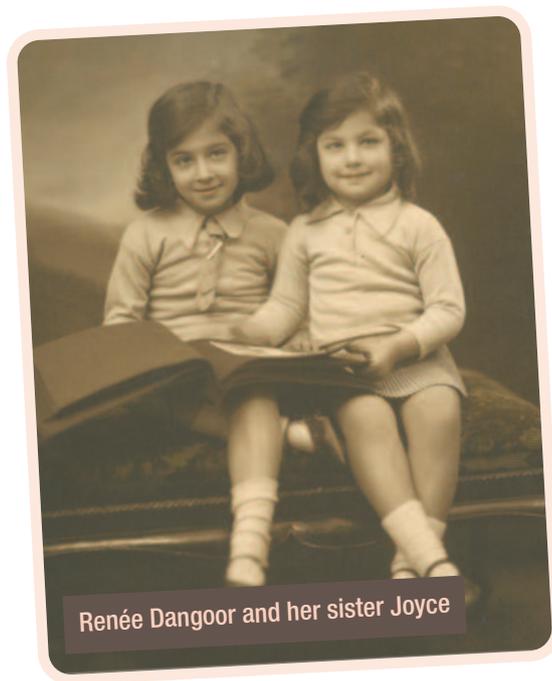
# CONTACTS

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## Publicity

For press enquiries contact Sophie Toumazis at tpr media  
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*"A story you never dreamed existed,  
by a natural film maker."*

Rachel Johnson  
Author and Columnist for  
the Mail on Sunday

*"A great story - brilliantly told. Informative,  
passionate and with an extraordinary cast of  
characters. It deserves to win prizes."*

James Lefanu  
Author, and Columnist for  
The Daily Telegraph

*"Remember Baghdad is a window on a lost world – Iraq's once  
vibrant Jewish community – ordinary lives impoverished by  
politics, intolerance and war. It is also impressive evidence of  
human determination to keep faith with the past."*

Ian Black  
Author, and veteran Middle East correspondent  
for The Guardian

A FILM BY FIONA MURPHY

A SPRING FILMS AND ECHODOCS PRODUCTION  
DIRECTOR FIONA MURPHY FILM EDITOR CHARLES CHABOT  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS GEORGE CAREY AND ANDRÉ SINGER  
PRODUCER ED DALLAL CO-PRODUCER MARK ANDERSON  
MUSIC MOLLY NYMAN

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