

Anita Mandl
Scientist and Artist
1926 – 2022

Anita Mandl, accompanied by her brother, arrived in London from Czechoslovakia on July 1st 1939 on the last but one of Nicholas Winton's humanitarian Kindertransports; she was 13 years old.

Born in Prague on 17th May 1926 to a middle-class family of Jewish heritage, her father owned a paper mill, her mother was a pianist and neither parent survived WWII. Her father died of a heart attack soon after the declaration, whilst her mother was sent to Terezin concentration camp. There she was tasked to play concerts for the entertainment of Nazi commanders, and did so throughout the entire war. On the day peace was declared she was murdered by her captors; an event that hugely contributed to Mandl's powerful sense of social justice and morality.

Anne Stevens, a Quaker schoolmistress in East London, sponsored Anita Mandl's life and education. Aged 16, she declared to her guardian her determination to be financially independent and was enrolled at Walthamstow College of Typing. The subsequent qualifications enabled Mandl to gain employment in Islington at the British Valve and Electrical Accessories Company. She was the youngest of all their secretaries and earned £5 per week, which she used to finance her night school studies at Birkbeck college, despite V1 and V2 bombs falling all around both work and college. She graduated from Birkbeck in 1946 with a general BSc and in 1947 with a First Class Honours in Zoology.

Taking up the offer of a job in the University of Birmingham Anatomy department, she worked on original research and gained a PhD in 1951. She worked closely with the celebrated zoologist Lord Zuckerman (1904 -1993), collaborating on the edit of a tome on the ovary as well as researching the effect of radiation on oocytes. In the aftermath of the atomic bomb this was considered a vital contribution to the understanding of potential mutations in the event of a nuclear war. Later on, research into cancers with Dr Denys Jennings (1904 – 1995) led to a long term partnership and companionship travelling by road widely over Europe, the Middle East and onwards to Afghanistan and Pakistan in an open-top Mercedes. They married in 1965. During a full career at Birmingham University that included gaining a DSc in 1960 Mandl enrolled herself at night school once again. This time it was at the Birmingham College of Art, where the Head of Sculpture, John Bridgeman, and tutor Bill Daley encouraged her to specialise in Sculpture. Her portraits of Solly Zuckerman and Peter Mitchell form part of the art collection at the University of Birmingham and the Zoological Society of London respectively. Mandl, however, is best known as a stone and wood carver. She left Birmingham after her marriage to Denys Jennings and moved to Devon, which enabled her to become a full time sculptor and pillar of the community. From her studio in the garden in Budleigh Salterton she produced an impressive body of work, just short of a thousand sculptures, mostly of a range of animals carved in fruit tree wood and other hardwoods and attractively coloured marbles and stone. Mandl was elected to fellowships of the Royal West of England Academy of Art as well as the Royal Society of Sculptors. She exhibited her works nationally always delivering her sculptures in vintage suitcases reminiscent of her

own single case with which she arrived from Czechoslovakia as a child. Her studies of animals are pared-down forms that eschew detail for an inherent essence of the character of each of her subjects, perfectly capturing their behaviour. Several of the sculptures Mandl considered to be her best she cast into bronze editions, enabling her work to be widely collected.

Anita Mandl, independent to the last, died at her home in Devon on Christmas Eve 2022.



Anita with her husband Denys in their garden in Budleigh Salterton on their wedding day 1965.



Anita Mandl



Anita Mandl and
Claude Koenig