**THE ALKMAAR SPEECH for the Darmstadt Ceremonies, 10 November 19**

to be delivered by Professor Gwythian Prins

My Lord Mayor, our fellow twin city delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

On 5 March 1942, less than two months after the Wannsee Conference had ordered top priority for killing all Europe's Jews, with the Netherlands on "List A," there was an unseasonable snowstorm in Alkmaar. In that snow, the city's entire Jewish population was marched from their synagogue in the Hofstraat to the railway station.

Here the German occupiers compelled them to buy their own tickets to be expelled from the first Dutch city to have welcomed Jews as early as 1604. In an act of astonishing courage and defiance to the Germans, Josina van Kinschot, wife of the Burgomaster, who the Germans had dismissed the previous month and who was now in hiding, stood there to bear witness and to bid farewell along with several Church leaders. At the Station, Rabbi de Wolff pronounced that “for this event the punishment of Heaven cannot fail to come.”

Their fatal journey took them first to the Ghetto in Amsterdam and thence, via the holding camp at Westerbork, into the east, into the darkness, to their deaths.

213 Jews were expelled from Alkmaar, 178 souls on that day, including my grand-parents, my uncle and entire wider family. 142 were murdered. Today, their names are engraved on a glass panel in the synagogue in Alkmaar.

But one Alkmaar Jew wasn't with his family. Alkmaar's great escaper. My late father Eli Prins. After eight years helping Jews and anti-nazis to escape from Germany and Austria, and helping lay foundations for the Resistance, he had escaped to England on 15 May 1940 on the last fishing boat to cross the North Sea to England after the German invasion.

After the war, with my aunt Roos Tobin-Prins – who had married an Englishman before the war and was working for the Royal Netherlands Navy in Bath (which is why my father came to Bath) – and an English friend, Jimmie Wills, my father conceived the idea of twinning his new English home and my birthplace Bath, in the west of England, with his birthplace Alkmaar.

So began the very first twinning of an English city with a continental one. Indeed I believe that the very concept of city twinning arose from Alkmaar-Bath.

And that is how it comes that at the invitation of Burgomaster Piet Bruinoog, who sadly cannot be here with us, and representing my father, the founder of the Alkmaar-Bath Twinning, I, as a half-Dutch Englishman, have the proud honour to speak on behalf of Alkmaar here today. Alkmaar's Twinning Committee is represented by my friend and colleague with me, its Chairman, Dick-Jan Braaij.

107,000 of 140,000 Dutch Jews - almost three quarters of the entire community - were deported to the East, on their way to the extermination camps of Auschwitz and Sobibor. It was the highest proportion of any Jewish population in occupied Europe to be murdered by the Nazis.

These, like the pogroms of Kristallnacht this weekend in 1938, are painful but necessary facts to remember. Because those who forget their past, or who deny it, are doomed to repeat it.

This is why, today, like all British people, I wear the Flanders Poppy. Because today, in Great Britain, is Remembrance Sunday. As we stand here, Her Majesty the Queen is leading the nation in the Act of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, central London. At eleven o'clock (midday here) - the exact time of the end of the First World War on 11th November 1918 - comes the Two Minutes Silence. The entire country stops to honour the sacrifice of two generations who died in the two World Wars so that my country – and all Europe – might be free. That is also why, My Lord Mayor, on behalf of my Alkmaar colleagues and myself representing my late father, I wish to thank you for convening us all here today *of all days*.

But above all we applaud you. We applaud you for having both the courage to face and to remember the evils that Nazi Germany visited upon European Jewry and the grace to atone for that terrible past. We thank you and we salute you. Only in this way can we - all together- ensure that such evil times never return. And we all know that anti-Semitism, the oldest hatred, has not died in Europe today. By no means.

Jews above all celebrate life. It is our toast - *l'chaim*: "to life". Life is the central theme of the *Kaddish*, the great Mourner's Prayer for the Dead.

Upon the entrance arch to Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Israel, are engraved the Almighty's resonant words, spoken through the prophet Ezekiel: "I will put my breath into you and you shall live again and I will set you upon your own soil."

Jewish life has returned to Alkmaar. The community is small, but the Synagogue has been re-purchased, beautifully restored, re-opened and, I am delighted to say, is represented today in our delegation by Sabina Frogel.

After the Second World War, like many survivors, for many years my Father refused to speak German or to visit this country. Then he began a correspondence with Mother Basilea Schlink. And so, my Lord Mayor, I must tell you that a further golden thread entwines the cities of Alkmaar, Bath and Darmstadt. For it was to the Marienschwesterschaft - and only to Darmstadt - and thanks to Mother Basilea, that eventually my Father and Mother came in their act of reconciliation. I know they would be especially delighted that the Sisters are participating in these ceremonies today. We, the Alkmaar delegation, look forward with great pleasure to visiting Kanaan this afternoon.

My Lord Mayor, by this inauguration today, Darmstadt steps forward to play its part in the hard and noble work of remembrance. *This* is the punishment of Heaven upon doers of Evil, predicted by Rabbi de Wolff on that snowy railway platform long ago. And we, from Alkmaar, are proud to be here to help you.