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PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC LECTURE – MR AREK HERSH

As part of the Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations, Mr Arek Hersh MBE will give a public lecture on Wednesday 29 January at the John Mackintosh Hall. The lecture will begin at 6.30pm.

Mr Hersh survived the Second World War despite being incarcerated in several infamous concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

Ends

Note to Editors

Arek was born and brought up in Poland. He had four siblings and was brought up in the Jewish faith in a tight-knit, loving family.

On 1 September 1939 the Germany army attacked Poland. Arek's family had to leave their home town and stay with relatives in Lodz, a big industrial city similar to Manchester. They walked there in a 65-km journey that took them three days.

In 1940 the Jews of Lodz had to start wearing the star of David on their outer clothing and soon were forced into a ghetto, where food was rationed and people lived in very cramped conditions. Towards 1941 the authorities took Arek to a camp called Otoschno, near Poznan, which was run by the SS. After 18 months there were only 11 of the original 2500 men left alive. Arek managed to survive through his job cleaning the camp commander's office which meant he was able to steal food.

Later, in the war Arek was taken to Lodz. He managed to hide from the SS in a cemetery while the ghetto children were taken to Chelmno where they were gassed. Alone, and without his family, Arek was accepted into the orphanage where he worked in the textile mill and was able to find food. He stayed there for two years.

In 1944 the Germans began to liquidate the Lodz ghetto and the remaining population were put on a goods train for the two-day journey to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The 185 children from

the orphanage were among them. When they arrived at Auschwitz, Dr Mengele selected people to work and people to go straight to their deaths. Arek didn't know what was happening, but he could tell that the fitter, healthier people were on the right so took advantage of a disturbance to run across to that side. He was made to leave all his clothes and possessions, had his head and body shaved and was made to shower. He was given a striped suit to wear and was tattooed with the number B7608. From that day onward Arek lost his name and was only referred to by his number.

On 18 January 1945 the Germans decided to clear Auschwitz camp. They took the remaining prisoners on a forced march, known as the death march, for three days with no food, wearing only their striped camp uniforms in deep snow and temperatures as low as minus 25 degrees. The survivors found themselves in Buchenwald in Germany where Arek was put into a children's barrack. In April he and 3000 other people were taken to the city of Weimar in Germany, loaded onto open wagons and sent off on a month-long rail journey to Theresienstadt. Many people died on the train. Arek was one of the 600 who arrived alive in Czechoslovakia on 8 May 1945. There they were liberated by the Russian army.