

Real Life Stories *Scottish Missionary Who Paid the Ultimate Price*

Jane Mathison Haining - Scottish Missionary

The story of Jane Haining is the story of a Scottish woman who was deeply committed to her faith and who sacrificed her life for her ideals. It was her calling that took her away from her native Scotland, first to Budapest, and finally to Auschwitz, where she perished.

Jane Haining, a Church of Scotland missionary who was forced into slave labour, died in Auschwitz in 1944, aged 47, after refusing to abandon the Jewish girls in her care at a home for Jewish girls run by the Scottish Mission in Budapest, Hungary.



Scottish Missionaries were advised to return home from Europe but Jane declined. There were 315 pupils including 48 boarders and Jane was determined to remain to look after them. She refused, and wrote: "If these children need me in days of sunshine, how much more do they need me in days of darkness."

The papers telling the extraordinarily moving story of prisoner 79467 were found in the World Mission Council's archives at the Kirk's head quarters in George Street in Edinburgh. They also contain a translation of the last letter she wrote two days before she died and correspondence showing the efforts by Bishop Laszlo Ravasz to try to secure her release.

Miss Haining, as she was known to her girls, was born in 1897 and grew up near Dunscore in Dumfriesshire. She worked as a secretary at a threadmaker company in Paisley for 10 years before she moved to Budapest in 1932 to work as a matron in the Jewish Mission School.

Despite being under police surveillance, the "house mother" managed to keep the children safe for four years until she was betrayed by the cook's son-in-law, whom she caught eating scarce food intended for the girls. Food was scarce and so she made trips to the market at 5 am. When her girl's shoes wore out it was reported that she cut up her leather luggage to make soles. Her recreation was listening on her wireless set to the calm voices of the BBC announcers in London and being immensely comforted by them. And so passed nearly 4 years of increasing austerity and struggle.

In retaliation against the pro Nazi Government being deposed, German troops swarmed across the Border and began mass arrests of Jewish citizens.

In April 1944 the Gestapo arrived at the Mission. She was arrested by two Gestapo officers at the Scottish Mission – they gave her 15 minutes to gather her belongings - and charged her with eight offences:

- That she had worked amongst the Jews
- That she had wept when seeing the girls attend class wearing the yellow stars
- That she had dismissed her housekeeper
- That she had listened to news broadcasts of the BBC
- That she had many British visitors
- That she was active in politics
- That she visited British prisoners of war
- That she had sent British prisoners of war parcels
- One of these charges she denied with all the force that was in her – she had never talked or meddled in politics.

Former pupil Agnes Rostas revealed that her haunting last words to sobbing children were, "Don't worry, I'll be back by lunch".

Miss Haining never did return to the school located next to St Columba's Scottish Church, and was held in a Budapest prison for several months before being transferred to Auschwitz in Nazi-occupied Poland where she died a slave labourer.

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One of the documents discovered is an extract from a report delivered to the Reformed Church in Hungary's Synod in 1945 – around 12 months after Miss Haining, who was forced into slave labour, had died. Mr Alexander said: “It reveals that Bishop Laszlo Ravasz approached the Prime Minister's office to try to have Jane freed, but it seems either he was not listened to or that the Nazis had already had her moved out of the local prison so as to prevent any local attempts to free her.

“In his address to the Synod he said ‘her superiors three times ordered her home, but she always replied that the Hungarian people were so true-hearted, honourable, and chivalrous that among them not a hair on her head would be touched. “‘I shall continue to do my duty,’ she declared, ‘and stick to my post’.”

At least 1.1 million people died in the Auschwitz concentration camps, some of which were equipped with gas chambers, but the exact circumstances behind Miss Haining's death are unclear. According to her death certificate, she died of “cachexia following intestinal catarrh”.



In 1997, after an initiative from her former church Queen's Park West in Glasgow, and a 10-year investigation by an Israeli board, Miss Haining was named as Righteous Among the Nations in Jerusalem's sacred Yad Vashem. She has a memorial cairn at Dunscore Church and was awarded a Hero of the Holocaust medal by the UK Government in 2010.

Jane's courage has not and must not be forgotten. Two stained glass windows embellish Queen's Park Church in Glasgow. They are entitled "Service and Sacrifice" For in service she lived her life and in sacrifice she laid it down.

. . . . Gleaned from several articles written

