

By Jane Warren

Suicide pact of the couple who escaped Hitler

IT IS a story that so moved the policeman involved with the case that when he was called upon to recount details of an elderly couple's suicide pact, he went much further than that. In an unusual step for an inquest, Detective Sergeant Ian Siggery decided to share details of the "vibrant" lives of Colin and Alice Anson who, aged 94 and 91, chose to die rather than become a burden to their families.

What he told the court revealed a love story spanning nearly seven decades that was underscored by bravery and devotion.

For Mr and Mrs Anson were a remarkable couple who dedicated their lives not only to each other and their three children, but to the country that had given them both a fresh start when they arrived here as child refugees during the war.

"It was clear they were very proud people," Siggery told the court.

The couple were still teenagers when they fled Nazi occupation in the 1930s via the Kindertransport, the rescue effort that brought thousands of children to the UK from Nazi Germany. They met in London when Colin was 26 and Alice 23.

Colin had escaped a few days before his 17th birthday. His father Curt Ascher - a political opponent of Hitler - had died at Dachau concentration camp.

"A man from the Gestapo said he had died of circulation failure but if you remove someone's head I daresay it would be severely impaired," Colin recalled in an interview.

The teenager was allowed into Britain on the understanding that he would "not become a burden to the public purse". Far from being a burden, in 1940 Colin volunteered for the Armed Forces, becoming one of an estimated 10,000 Germans and Austrians who fled Nazi persecution and went on to fight for Britain.

His story was told in the 2010 book *German Schoolboy, British Commando*. "I felt very grateful for the opportunity of being allowed to join the British forces," he told the BBC in an interview. "I couldn't stand by and let other people sort it out."

Colin and Alice Anson, who fled Germany as teenagers, grew up to fight the Nazis



Pictures: INS, REX

LIKE many of the refugees Colin - who was born Claus Ascher - adopted an English name. He picked Anson because "when I had to choose a new one, an Avro Anson twin-engine flew over so I thought I'll have that".

Initially "the king's most loyal enemy aliens" - as the corps of refugees was known - was not allowed to fight. That changed in 1942 and Colin trained with 3-Troop, the only German-speaking Commando unit in the British Army. The stakes were high: Germans caught behind enemy lines were tortured and executed as traitors.

"When we were in action against what was to us enemy forces... the (prisoners) would start asking me questions about why do you speak such good German and I might have to remind them that it was I who was asking the questions and they were here to answer please," he said, pointedly.

Anson took part in the invasions of Italy and Sicily in 1943, surviving a near-fatal head wound after his ship came under attack from German bombers - shrapnel remained in his skull.

"I was happy to make a contribution," Colin explained of his exploits. "I did not perform any great heroics that I can recall."

In late 1945 he requested to be posted to Frankfurt, with the



intention of finding his mother. The following year he became a British citizen and was able to bring her back to the UK.

In 1949 he met his future wife Alice Gross at a café where he was having tea with his mother. Alice, the brilliant daughter of a Jewish banker, was just 14 when she fled to Britain from Vienna. She had also joined the British war effort and worked in the photographic section of Bomber

TEST OF TIME: Devoted couple Colin and Alice Anson, above, in 2010, left, and right, Colin in his army uniform.



Command HQ at High Wycombe where she helped pinpoint launch sites of Hitler's V1 flying bombs.

The couple married on December 21, 1951, and had three children, Barbara, Diana and Edward. Colin managed a business before retiring in 1987. His wife owned and ran a laundrette and in her spare time worked for charities including Gingerbread, Rape Crisis and Harrow

Women's Centre. And there their story may have quietly ended. But Alice and Colin had decided long before their joint suicide that when their health deteriorated beyond a certain point they would take their own lives.

And so it was that last June, they took 30 morphine tablets they had been "gifted" by a friend, a doctor's widow who had three years earlier.

When it appeared their suicide attempt had failed, Mrs Anson phoned for an ambulance and said they needed help. They were taken to hospital and died 11 days apart of pneumonia brought on by the painkillers.

They left notes for their children, one of which read: "We've had a long and happy life, what more could one expect?"

Another stated that they did not want to "hang around suffering and bothering the family we love". They had even paid for their own funerals in advance.