



An occasional column by  
**Andrew Rosthorn**

## **Meis Mitzvah in Shrewsbury**

Five months after Olivia Jane Frank, a former Mossad spy,<sup>1</sup> died in the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, the *Jewish Chronicle* revealed her story to readers of the oldest continuously published Jewish newspaper in the world. They gave her a double deck headline.

**Trans Mossad spy who helped track down the Munich terrorists is laid to rest**

**Olivia Jane Frank, who has died aged 76, infiltrated the PLO in Beirut**

Two lines from *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* came to mind.<sup>2</sup>

'You're not going to use the story, Mr Scott?'

'No, sir. This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact. Print the legend.'

The 'trans Mossad spy' died at 67, not 76. She did not track down the Black September Munich terrorists and she did not infiltrate the PLO in Beirut. She called herself Jayne, not Jane.

After keeping operational silence for nearly thirty years, she started trying to tell her story in 2003, apparently motivated by disgust at the covert sale of arms to Saddam Hussein under Margaret Thatcher and by utter despair at the aggressive foreign policy of Ariel Sharon and the Likud regime in Israel. Sharon's 1982 invasion of Lebanon killed her lover.

The *Sunday Times* and two other Fleet Street newspapers turned down the story of a transgender Mossad spy who had double-crossed MI6.

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Olivia Jayne Frank, 1956-2023' in this issue at <<https://shorturl.at/BJ028>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/88/olivia-jayne-frank-1956-2023-2/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Script by James Warner Bellah and Lewis Goldbeck for the 1962 John Ford film.

Olivia died with her boots off and money in the bank, but without leaving a will and with no known living relative. The hospital had a phone number for her close friend and proof-reader Tom Phillips, a former Ferranti Computer Systems engineer, who knew all about the consequences of illegal arms deals<sup>3</sup> but lived in Dorset.

I had gently edited the three books that Olivia self-published through Amazon and I saw her several times in hospital, but neither Tom nor I had any status when Catherine Marshall, medical examiner officer of the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, started a genealogy search and postponed a cremation after a non-Jewish chaplain said that Olivia had hoped for a Jewish burial.

A recent Wikipedia entry for Olivia 'Jane' Frank now quotes the *Jewish Chronicle*:

Her burial was complicated because Frank was a 'meis mitzvah', that is a Jew with no living relatives whose burial had to be financed through charity. However, her identity and past work could be confirmed through an anonymous source in the Israeli intelligence community.

The *Jewish Telegraph* in Manchester reported last November that Misaskim Manchester, an Orthodox charity founded in Brooklyn, New York, in 2004 by volunteer ambulance attendants,

had to ascertain proof of the woman's Jewish identity, as the only information to hand was her name and date of birth. Time was limited as the hospital threatened a private cremation ceremony if a Jewish burial could not be expedited. The same day, Misaskim's genealogy researcher was on the job. By the following day he had discovered that the Manchester-born woman had emigrated to Israel in the early 20s and joined the Israel Defence Forces.

The researcher eventually managed to verify the information from a high-ranking official in Israeli intelligence who confirmed that her mother was Jewish, but not her father.

Misaskim promptly halted the cremation and, three weeks after the initial request and following the necessary hospital bureaucracy, her body was transported to north Manchester's tahara house.<sup>4</sup>

Misaskim then asked Rabbi Yossi Jacobs and the chairman of

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<sup>3</sup> John F. Wilson, *Ferranti. a History: Volume 3: Management, mergers and fraud 1987-1993* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> A building where Jewish bodies are ritually cleansed.

Birmingham's Singers Hill Synagogue to arrange the burial. Rabbi Jacobs and his congregation willingly agreed to pay more than £10,000 for the burial plot.

Misaskim's team of ladies chevra kadisha<sup>5</sup> completed the tahara and Misaskim volunteers escorted the body to Birmingham. A Misaskim spokesman said: 'She was finally laid to rest in a moving funeral, at Witton Jewish Cemetery in a true testament to the power of unity and faith.'

The *Jewish Chronicle* quoted Doniel Stanton of Manchester Misaskim:

We got confirmation that she did work for the Israelis and she had a Jewish mother. The rabbi said he trusted the integrity of the person in intelligence. For the rabbi of Misaskim, that was official enough.

Official enough? Did the 'high-ranking official in Israeli intelligence who confirmed that her mother was Jewish, but not her father' know that the first paragraph of the prologue to Olivia Frank's book *The Third Direction* begins:

My father ran away from his Jewish home in Manchester to join the illustrious Rifle Brigade in the years before the Second World War.

Or was the high-ranking official perhaps suggesting that Manchester Misaskim and the *Jewish Chronicle* better print the legend?

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<sup>5</sup> Literally 'holy society'.