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BRITAIN AND THE HOLOCAUST THEN AND NOW

By

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ABSTRACT

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This is a study of the relationship between Britain and the Holocaust from 1933 until today. Britain's search for a means to respond to, understand, represent and remember the Holocaust has resulted in the construction of a version of the Holocaust that has been and continues to be filtered through the prism of British national identity. It is argued that the Holocaust forces Britain to define itself and therefore Britishness and the meaning of British identity are at the centre of this study. This thesis challenges the notion that Britain is simply a bystander to the Holocaust and focuses on the presence and impact of the Holocaust in the lives of ordinary British people. Then and now, British people have always drawn the Holocaust within the reassuring parameters of their own national narrative, creating an active link between themselves and the destruction process, and exposing the diverse and complicated nature of British identity.

This inter-disciplinary study is based on the close reading of distinctive examples drawn from literary and cultural sources that centralise the responses, actions and memories of a diverse range of British people. Chapter One proves how Britain's relationship with the Holocaust is traceable from 1933 in the work of British pro-refugee and rescue campaigners. 1945 is considered to be the cornerstone year in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Chapter Two provides the Holocaust survivors' perspective on the liberation of the concentration camps. Britain's perceived role as a liberating nation remains central to Britain's Holocaust memories. Constructions of Britishness defined press and popular responses to 1945 and are explored in Chapter Three. Chapter Four highlights how questions of identity and belonging defined British Jewish responses to the Holocaust. Finally, a case study of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition illustrates the enduring nature of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust.

Contents

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To Professor Tony Kushner, my guide in all things and my best friend.
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Without your faith in me I'd be lost.

To my parents, for everything as always. I hope you know.

Introduction

Britain and the Holocaust
Then and Now

This is the study of a relationship. The relationship between Britain and the destruction of European Jewry began before that process of destruction had a name and continues today.[1] It is an enduring and a complicated relationship. As this is written Britain has one of the largest and most sophisticated museum exhibitions on the Holocaust in its capital city, a state supported Holocaust Memorial Day and one of its citizens serving a three year sentence for Holocaust denial in an Austrian prison. The history of that relationship is not limited to a study of British state, governmental or military responses to the Nazi destruction process as it was ongoing nor can it be concluded with the cessation of the Second World War in 1945. Its roots are also to be found in the lives and reactions of British individuals – activists, newspaper readers, liberators, museum curators and visitors, Jews and non-Jews. This study will reveal that Britain has never simply been a 'bystander' to the Holocaust, that the country's responses are not just reactions to events from a physical and psychological distance. This event is part of 'us' and has been since it began. Through a close reading of sources that centralise the experiences and responses of the British people, both then and now, this study builds a picture of the development of that relationship and focuses on the way in which Britain's memory and representation of the Holocaust has always been intimately connected with British identity.

In an assessment of British and Anglo–Jewish immediate post war responses to the destruction of European Jewry, historian Dan Stone has identified a need to bring 'the Holocaust under cognitive control'.[2] For Stone that phrase explains attempts made by

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[1] A further connection to Dan Stone's argument and to the notion of a need to place the Holocaust within a familiar or 'domestic' narrative in order to make it manageable might also be found, Isabel Wollaston suggests, in the very naming of the destruction process; 'If to name is to place certain experiences within a particular narrative or interpretative framework, then it can also serve to domesticate or conventionalise the inexpressible.' Isabel Wollaston, A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance, (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1996), p.3.

[2] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence; Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain, 1945-6' in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), pp.13-29.

Jewish and non-Jewish individual observers to cope with and manage the information regarding the destruction of Europe's Jews that entered British society at the end of the Second World War. That complex search for control is manifest in the language, tone and content of the written works of those individuals. Their own definition and understanding of their cultural and ultimately, their national identity provides a basis for a search for a means to deal with the Holocaust and often with their individual feelings of guilt and inadequacy in the face of its truths. That search for control and that attempt to manage the fallout from the steady revelation of the scale and totality of the destruction process was not limited to individuals or to the post war world alone. This thesis is an account of Britain's attempt on a national level to do just that, to 'bring the Holocaust under cognitive control'. It is a study of Britain's attempt to create a place for the Holocaust in an existing British national narrative and subsequently in a collective memory. This is an account of the meeting between Britishness and the destruction process from 1933 until today that resulted in the creation of Britain's *own* Holocaust: that is a version, memory and representation of the Holocaust that is infused with the tenets of a definition of Britishness in order that it might be understood, managed and controlled by British society and culture. The roots of that process lie in the first British reactions to the advent of Nazism and to the earliest examples of the persecution and destruction of European Jewry. It was cemented in and cannot be disentangled from the complex events and experience of the liberation year of 1945. A study of that crucial year should be considered the cornerstone of this project and of the relationship between Britain and the formation of its own Holocaust. It is a process whose present day manifestations can be found in British popular, museum based and educational representations of the Holocaust. It is a response that affected and continues to affect the way in which Britain records and represents the identity and specifically, the Jewishness of the Holocaust's victims and survivors. That response also determines Britain's representation of the role of the perpetrators and crucially of the behaviour of the British state and people whilst the destruction process was ongoing. This study will seek to ask why that process was and continues to be necessary if Britain was ever to successfully build a place for itself in relation to the Holocaust. An exploration of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust becomes an exploration of Britain's relationship with itself. The consequences for any understanding or representation of the Holocaust in Britain, then and now, of the need for that control over this subject form the central focus of

this project. The process of bringing the Holocaust under 'cognitive control' is inherently connected to a British national identity rooted in a liberal ideology that has always defined British state and popular responses to the Nazis' exterminatory policy. Then and now the formation of the relationship between Britain and an understanding of the Holocaust is filtered through what Stone has called 'culturally familiar narratives'.[3] As a result the Holocaust, utterly unfamiliar, challenging and disruptive on all levels is instead adapted, accommodated, and made manageable by its absorption into a British national narrative. In this case that is a narrative inextricably intertwined with a Second World War time narrative and memory that arguably is still at the core of British identity today. A study of present day British representations of the Holocaust, of Britain's *own* Holocaust, will reveal how Britain has achieved 'a manageable collective memory' of the Holocaust and how that process began whilst the extermination policy was ongoing.[4] The formation of that memory and its various representations have never been based in a cynical British Jewish or non-Jewish desire to ignore the Holocaust, but rather as Stone suggests, in a need to incorporate 'it into frameworks which were already familiar and culturally safe'.[5] The result of that process has however inevitably created a Holocaust constructed, remembered and represented through a filter of Britishness.

Analysis of Allied responses to the Holocaust has developed considerably and is the basis for this study. That development has occurred against a backdrop of ever increasing interest on both an academic and popular level in the Holocaust. The study of the Holocaust may now rightly claim to challenge the First World War as one of the most researched areas of modern history. For this study the most significant research dealing with Allied response is that which regards the Holocaust *as part* of British (and American) history and centralises British popular response and attitudes. Foremost amongst these is Tony Kushner's The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History.[6] Bernard Wasserstein's work on the British state's wartime attitude towards Jews has been described as 'the leading study

[3] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence,' p.13.
[4] ibid, p.14.
[5] ibid, p.16.
[6] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994).

of British policy during the Second World War'.[7] More recently Louise London's detailed study of British immigration policy has also attempted to account for the roots of British state and governmental responses to the destruction process.[8] Studies dealing with the responses of Britain and the British people will be the focus of this thesis. However, those studies that take Britain as their central subject area must also be considered as part of a wider international historiographical context. The growth of interest in the Allies and the Holocaust, and particularly in the liberation of the camps, has also created a body of work relating to America's relationship with the Holocaust. For example, Peter Novick's recent exploration of a collective memory of the Holocaust in an American context has made a challenging and provocative contribution to the historiography of Allied response.[9] America's wartime reaction to the destruction of European Jewry had previously been assessed in important works by Henry Feingold, Saul Friedman and in David Wyman's The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945 for example.[10] Difficult questions regarding the motives and consequences of the Allies' apparently limited response during the Holocaust years have been considered, as for example in the recent collection of essays edited by David Cesarani and Paul Levine, Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation.[11] The increasing body of work that explores the concept of Holocaust memory and remembrance will also be called upon in this study's attempt to piece together a picture of Britain's own Holocaust memory. Texts such as James Young's The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning and the work of Geoffrey Hartman on Holocaust remembrance are just two examples that explore the complex meaning of memory in relation to the Holocaust.[12] The debate

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[7] Louise London, Whitehall and the Jews 1933 – 1948 British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), p.3. London was referring to Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979).

[8] ibid.

[9] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, (Bloomsbury, London, 2000).

[10] Henry Feingold, The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust 1938-1945, (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1970), Saul Friedman, No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy Towards Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945, (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1973) and David Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945, (Pantheon, New York, 1984).

[11] David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation, (Frank Cass, London, 2002).

[12] James Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993) and Geoffrey Hartman, Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994). See also, James Young, At Memory's Edge: After Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000), and Geoffrey

over the possibility of Allied involvement in the rescue of Europe's Jews that is assessed in the opening chapters of this study has also generated much work, not all as controversial as William Rubinstein's The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies could not have saved more Jews from the Nazis.[13]

Here, within the framework of an assessment of British national responses, the efforts of particular groups or individuals to gain that necessary control over the facts and impact of the destruction process will be considered. Together they will illustrate the complexity of British response. The case studies in this thesis make clear that definitions of Britishness operated on multiple levels to determine the kind of Holocaust that would be manageable for the British state and people. Drawing on a wide range of examples including those taken from literary or museum based sources, this study will employ a multi and inter-disciplinary approach. In the following chapters, the 'close reading' of sources will mean that the language, the tone, content and structure of each example will be assessed. An individual writer, journalist, survivor or museum curator's choice of words and mode of representation will be explored in order to reveal the nature of their particular response to the destruction process. The finer detail of an individual case study is regarded as the key to its place in the wider relationship between Britain and the Holocaust. Close reading makes it possible to move beyond the assessment of government or state responses and to use a select number of individual, varied and interesting examples in order to trace the British public's search for 'cognitive control'. The British state, public, press and crucially Jewish community often differed and changed in their responses and actions in relation to the destruction process. However, those actions and responses, those attempts at 'cognitive control' are united by the fact that they are all rooted in definitions of Britishness and of British identity. At each stage of Britain's relationship with the destruction process, the pro-refugee groups, the British government, the British public, press and the British Jewish community would look to their own national narrative and to their Britishness to interpret and account for the facts and to justify their response. That same national narrative, that 'liberal

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Hartman, The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996).

[13] William Rubinstein, The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies could not have saved more Jews form the Nazis, (Routledge, London, 1997).

imagination'[14] that shaped British conceptions of the Holocaust's Jewish victims, that created the image of Britain as the liberating nation in 1945, has endured to make necessary what Dan Stone has called the 'domestication of violence' in Britain's representation and 'memory' of the Holocaust today.[15]

Tony Kushner has said of the views of the British population in response to the Nazi regime that they 'represented an amalgam of antipodes'.[16] Increasingly historians have come to recognise that the reaction of the peoples of Britain and America to the development and aftermath of the destruction process were diverse, complicated and subject to frequent change. The labelling of Britain and America as 'bystanders' to the Holocaust has had dual implications in terms of an understanding of those reactions. On a practical level the term 'bystander' has allowed for clear delineation of the geographical borders of the Holocaust. The term also makes clear that connections remain between the Holocaust and those nations outside of those geographical or physical borders. However the negative overtones of the term or the simple categorisation it allows for may have meant a failure to analyse the finer nuances of British or Allied responses. In some cases that has led to an all too speedily reached conclusion that those responses were defined by antisemitism alone and were fatally inadequate. The extent to which those reactions were based on a particular perception of Jews and to what degree that perception was an antisemitic one must be considered in terms of Britain's long term commitment to a liberal ideology that informed British attitudes to Jews at all levels. That approach makes clear the importance of a close reading of individual, popular or public responses in partnership with any study of British governmental or state action during and after the destruction process. When the extermination was ongoing antisemitism coexisted with genuine concern, calls for refugee aid and victim rescue, real sympathy, ambivalence, wartime weariness and disinterest amongst the British responses. What united those responses was their British context. In *Chapter One* of this work the crucial role that definitions of Britishness or often more accurately, of Englishness played in shaping specific reactions to the refugee crisis that heralded the beginning of the Holocaust is considered. Here too it becomes possible to see how far, under the banner of British

[14] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination.
[15] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence.'
[16] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.31.

national response, a diverse range of individual views existed that were nonetheless united by an interpretation of British identity and of appropriate British behaviour. True, their sometimes differing interpretations of what it meant to *be British* would lead a diverse range of British individuals and groups to different conclusions with regard to Britain's appropriate response to the destruction process – not least, for example, with regard to the question of the rescue of Europe's Jews. Yet Britishness remained the point of reference. If the diverse range of attitudes amongst the British people has been difficult to trace, then the actions and beliefs of the British pro-refugee workers explored in the first chapter of this study could perhaps be considered some of the easiest to access. Figures such as James Parkes, Eleanor Rathbone and Victor Gollancz never wavered from their staunch position of support for the Jewish refugees from Nazism. More importantly for this study, they never wavered from their belief that such action on the part of the British government and people should be considered as a natural expression of their national, their British identity. And yet, their names, voices and legacy remain at the margins of the Holocaust that is represented to the British public today and the chapter will seek to understand why. Their activities can be interpreted as one of the first attempts in Britain to search for and gain that 'cognitive control' over the details and possible consequences of the Nazis' extermination policy in a definition of Britishness: a policy that arguably, they and only a few likeminded individuals foresaw. The interaction between those working with an often unique level of perception and understanding of the destruction process and the British people and government during the 1930s provides a way into those first moments when the fate of European Jewry began to be entwined with Britishness.

From the 1930s and the war years, the focus of this study moves to consider in detail the complex events of liberation and the crucial partnership between the year of 1945 and the construction of Britain's *own* Holocaust through a search for cognitive control. Only recently has the experience of liberation as an event its own right been removed from the shadow of the history of the last days of the Second World War. In his 1990 work The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps Jon Bridgman commented that 'the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps has not been the

subject of much scholarly attention'.[17] Bridgman suggests this absence of scholarly analysis might be explained because, 'at first glance, liberation, after all, was something like VE Day, a dramatic moment to be sure, but hardly one that raises any questions of historical interest'.[18] Bridgman set out to consider the 'drama of liberation' by dividing it into periods and assessing the run up to, and aftermath of, the Allied arrival. The liberation of the concentration camp has now been recognised as a distinct moment in the process of the Holocaust. Joanne Reilly's work on the liberation of Bergen Belsen, Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp[19] illustrates why a close analysis of the events of the liberation experience for liberators and survivors allows us to understand Belsen's history and place in the destruction process. Most importantly for this study, Reilly et al's Belsen in History and Memory[20] explores the roots of Britain's relationship with liberation and with that particular camp. The public responses to the imagery and representation of liberation have also received important attention and the memories of the liberated have been explored.[21] For this study that relationship between the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps and the conclusion of the war is crucial. Whilst historians may have increasingly given the liberation process the individual attention it requires, for Britain and the construction of its *own* Holocaust the shadow of those 'last days' is very much present.

During what James Lucas has called 'the last days of the Reich' the German chain of command began to break down in the face of the deteriorating military situation.[22] Confusion existed over the future of the remaining prisoners of the racial policy. Disputes ensued between Berlin and the extermination and concentration camp commanders. The rigid and efficient routines of the destruction process began to take

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[17] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps, (B.T.Batsford, London, 1990), p.9.
[18] ibid, p.9.
[19] Joanne Reilly, Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, (Routledge, London, 1998). See also Joanne Reilly, 'Britain and Belsen', (PhD Thesis, University of Southampton, Department of History, 1994).
[20] Joanne Reilly et al, Belsen in History and Memory, (Frank Cass, London, 1997).
[21] On the response to, and use of, liberation imagery see Barbie Zelizer, Remembering to Forget – Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998). For a recent example of a collection of Belsen survivors' (and liberators') memories of liberation see, Ben Flanagan and Donald Bloxham, (eds), Remembering Belsen: Eyewitnesses Record the Liberation, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2005).
[22] James Lucas, Last Days of the Reich: The Collapse of Nazi Germany, May 1945, (Arms and Armour, London, 1986).

on an air of chaos. However neither chaos nor the Allied advance brought about a cessation in the killing process. One third of all Jews who managed to survive in camps until January 1945 died before any act of liberation. With liberation and its place in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust at the heart of this study, it is important to pause and consider the final weeks of the Nazis' concentration and extermination camp system.

Majdanek was the first of the Nazi camps to be liberated by the Red Army on 23 July 1944. More than 400,000 people were murdered in the camp. Only 700 prisoners remained alive at liberation. During 1944 the Red Army found what remained of the infrastructures of camps at Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka. On the resumption of their military campaign east of the river Oder in January 1945, the Russians arrived at Stuthoff and on 27 January at Auschwitz Birkenau. The last transport arrived at Auschwitz on 5 January and the camp commandant ordered the evacuation of the camp and the final roll call on 18 January. By the time the Russians arrived more than half of the approximately six thousand prisoners who had not been evacuated from the camp had died. A further thousand died after the liberation so that the total number of Auschwitz survivors is believed to have numbered no more than two thousand, 95% of whom were Jewish. The final phase of the Russian offensive began in April 1945. The Red Army liberated Gross Rosen, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbruck. Many of those camps contained prisoners who had been moved, sometimes more than once, from camps further east. Russian troops encountered many of the major killing sites in Eastern Europe and as a result they did not find as many survivors as British and American forces would in concentration camps like Bergen Belsen. That change in the appearance and nature of these camps at their liberation would preclude a full understanding of their relationship to each other and to the destruction process as a whole in the minds of the British public for many years. On 11 April 1945 the 104th Infantry Timberwolf Division and the Third Armoured Division of the United States Army arrived at Dora concentration camp near Nordhausen. They found only 1000 survivors and 3000 corpses. On the same day escaped Russian prisoners led units of the American Fourth and Sixth armoured divisions to Buchenwald, where as prisoner Elie Wiesel describes, the prisoners took control just days before the Americans arrived; 'On April 5th, the wheel of history turned. Resistance took hold of the camp. Toward noon everything was quiet again. The SS had fled and the resistance had

taken charge.'[23] On 28 April the Americans arrived at Dachau and reportedly executed over one hundred of the SS camp guards. The United States 11th Armoured division liberated Mauthausen on 5 May and the camp at Gusen the day before. Throughout May 1945 American troops arrived at camps at Neugamme and Flossenberg. Having witnessed the scenes at Ohrdurf concentration camp, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower wrote to the US Chief of Staff George Marshall; 'The things I saw beggar description.'[24] Eisenhower's encounter prompted him to order that every Allied unit stationed near the camp should visit for themselves. The General also wrote to Churchill and to De Gaulle with the same suggestion. The divisions of the American army involved in the liberation of concentration camps form part of a group certified as Liberator units by the American military and the American government today. Only certified Liberator Units may display their flag in Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The Russian advance had been a factor in the Nazis' attempts to conceal the evidence of their actions and to move their remaining prisoners west. As a result the numbers of prisoners in killing centres like Auschwitz Birkenau were reduced in the months before liberation. Prisoners from camps like these were moved out of the Red Army's path and on to death marches to camps like Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau. Jon Bridgman has described the liberation of camps like Auschwitz Birkenau as a 'hollow liberation'.[25] Here the liberators found only a relatively small number of prisoners and only the physical evidence of the mass murder of many others. Whilst the categories may oversimplify the realities of the liberation experience as a whole, Bridgman also highlights the liberation of Bergen Belsen as a 'classic liberation', evoking images of Allied flags and starving prisoners in stripes. Also documented are the rare cases of 'spontaneous liberation' when prisoners took control of camps themselves and the singular case of a 'transfer liberation' at Theresienstadt when the Nazis relinquished control to the Red Cross.[26] The Russian reports of their encounter with the camp at Auschwitz Birkenau received significant coverage in the Russian press and only

[23] Elie Wiesel in Robert Abzug, 'The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps; Understanding and Using History,' in Dimensions – A Journal of Holocaust Studies, (Volume 9, Number 1, 1995), p.135.
[24] In Stephen Ambrose, 'Eisenhower and the Final Solution' in Dimensions – A Journal of Holocaust Studies, (Volume 9, Number 1, 1995), p.9.
[25] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust, p.11.
[26] ibid, p.11.

relatively scant attention in Britain. It was to take many years before Auschwitz Birkenau assumed the central position it now holds in Holocaust history, memory and representation. Furthermore, the camp of the Russian reports was not the Auschwitz of 1941 or even of 1944. Its true identity, scale and significance in terms of the Nazi exterminatory policy were not immediately recognised. The fact that this camp's name did not yet dominate British or international understanding of the Holocaust is crucial in piecing together British responses to the sights and sounds of the liberated Belsen in the spring of 1945. If liberation is at the heart of Britain's *own* Holocaust, then no moment of liberation is more significant in the formation of that version of the Holocaust, than the liberation of Bergen Belsen.

That movement of the remaining prisoners from the eastern killing centres changed the identity of the western concentration camps and triggered the overcrowding and appalling downturn in conditions that faced British and American troops in the spring of 1945. The change in Bergen Belsen's identity was profound. Belsen was the largest concentration camp liberated in Germany. It became the largest Displaced Person's Camp in the British zone of occupation. It has been estimated, although as Hagit Lavsky comments, 'nowhere is there a statistical demographic estimate of the ethnic religious composition of the Belsen camp at the time of liberation', that some 95% of the people liberated in Belsen, were Jews.[27] However, Belsen had initially held 'Sternlager' status as a camp in which the Nazis held prisoners believed to be useful for potential exchange with the Allies for captive German civilians. By March 1945 the numbers in Belsen had risen to 41,520 in a camp designed to hold approximately 7500. The water supply was polluted and almost exhausted and the camp was a site of total neglect. The camp now faced the arrival of almost 25,000 sick and dying prisoners from the East. The combination of those factors has led Bridgman to conclude that, 'what happened in Bergen Belsen in the last weeks before liberation was another form of genocide; genocide by cynical neglect and administrative indifference'.[28] After a visit to a deteriorating Belsen, the Reischskommisar for concentration camps, Kurt Becher had suggested to Belsen commander, Josef Kramer that the only option was to hand the camp over to the British. The British ordered an

[27] Hagit Lavsky, 'The Day After; Bergen Belsen from Concentration Camp to the Centre of the Jewish Survivors in Germany' in German History, (Volume 11, Number 2, June 1993), pp.36 – 59.
[28] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust, p.41.

eight kilometre neutral zone around the camp. On 13 April Kramer ordered the majority of the SS to leave the camp. He remained with a significant number of Hungarian guards. The British troops arrived at Belsen on 15 April 1945.

It would take days for the British to gain any level of control over the camp. The random murder of prisoners by guards continued. Death by disease and starvation abounded at a rate of over five hundred people a day. Many prisoners died as a result of well-intentioned British attempts to feed them. In his 2005 work, After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945 Ben Shephard has raised questions regarding the efficiency of the British relief effort in the liberated Belsen, commenting of the initial feeding programme, 'It was later estimated that some 2000 people perished as a result of being given the wrong food. The British had made their first big mistake.'[29] Shephard's criticism of British activity in the camp is based on what he perceives as their failure to arrive at the camp with any comprehensive plan of action, asking rather simply, 'Did the British make a mess of it?'[30] The existence of any such plan for action in Belsen would however have depended on the existence of an *intention* amongst the British troops in the area to seek and find Belsen or camps like it. Whilst we know that the British government and even the troops on the ground were aware of the existence of concentration camps, the soldiers in Germany who eventually became liberators that day were not *looking* for camps. Their post war testimonies record the haphazard process by which they became involved with Belsen.[31] Furthermore it is questionable as to how far any such plan would have been adequate in the face of the destruction evident in Belsen in April 1945. Shephard comments in his introduction, 'when the military are asked to deal with civilian problems, they are not always comfortable in the role'.[32] That may be so. It does not follow that the attempts made by British troops in the immediate days after the camp's liberation to feed and support its victims were based in anything other than a well intentioned struggle to cope with an overwhelming task. Belsen was without any context for the liberating troops. Shephard speaks of Belsen's liberation as 'a sad tale of human

[29] Ben Shephard, After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945, (Jonathan Cape, London, 2005), p.42.
[30] ibid, p.5.
[31] See for example liberator Derrick Sington's memories of Belsen in his Belsen Uncovered, (Duckworth, London, 1946).
[32] Ben Shephard, After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945, p.5.

frailty'.[33] Perhaps his expectation of British behaviour does not always account for that frailty or for the search for context in *the familiar* that began with those troops and would later shape their country's response to the camp and to the event of which it was part.

Slowly the British did begin to grapple in earnest with the camp. The process of cleaning and disinfecting began. Medical treatment was started and the supply of food and water carefully initiated and controlled. Prisoners were fed a mixture of flour, salt, sugar and food combined with milk to rebuild their shattered digestive systems. Medical units of the army constructed a temporary hospital. By the end of April the Red Cross and British medical students arrived to aid the shortage of personnel and supplies. Mass burials began on 17 April and continued until 28 April. Survivors were moved from one site to another as barracks were burned down. By 19 May some 27,000 survivors remained in Bergen Belsen. The total number of deaths between the day of liberation and June 1945 is estimated to be 14,000. Many of the prisoners who found themselves in Belsen in 1945 had already faced frequently dashed hopes of liberation as they were moved from camp to camp and had survived the psychological trauma of apparently being freed from extermination centres like Auschwitz only to be re incarcerated in the deteriorating conditions of camps like Belsen.

The struggle for understanding faced by those liberated in concentration and extermination camps in 1945 is explored in *Chapter Two* in the words and images of their written testimonies. Returning to Holocaust survivor testimony in an attempt to piece together the realities of the liberation experience centralises the subjects of memory, the challenges of the literary representation of the Holocaust and of the use of testimony for the historian. Primo Levi, one of the most prominent memoirists of the Holocaust once stated: 'My books are not history books.'[34] Of course despite Levi's assertion, his work and that of survivors Elie Wiesel, Jean Amery and others has become a fundamental part of the study of the Holocaust. The centrality of

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[33] Ben Shephard, After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945, p.5.

[34] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, Originally published as Se Questo e Un Uomo, (Gilulio Einaudi, Italy, 1958), p.391. (First published in Britain by Bodley Head, 1965). The edition of It This is A Man used in this thesis was published by Vintage in 1996. In that edition, the 'Afterword: The Author's Answers to His Readers' Questions' (p. 381-398) contains Levi's own thoughts in response to a series of questions about his experiences. Several of Levi's remarks that are included in this thesis are taken from this source.

testimony in that field of study is determined not only by its intimate connection to the events of the Holocaust. Testimony challenges the accepted practice of historical analysis as a result of the circumstances of its creation and the nature of its content. Testimony also makes clear that the concept of liberation went beyond the day of the Allied troops' arrival and existed in multiple forms during the survivors' Holocaust experience. Holocaust survivor testimonies have therefore challenged assumptions that the experience of liberation was unquestionably positive or that it simply represented what Jon Bridgman has called, 'the end of the Holocaust'.[35] Liberation, even if it did come, rarely signalled the conclusion of the victims' camp or indeed of their Holocaust experience. Liberation was a transitional stage between their experiences as prisoners and the beginnings of the process of survival. Often their attempts to come to terms with that transition shaped the content and form of their written testimony so that Levi concludes that writing If This Is A Man represented for him 'an interior liberation'.[36] The extent to which Levi's writing ever granted him that liberty from Auschwitz is questionable and the lasting impact of liberation is explored further in *Chapter Two*. Testimony reflects the truth that for many survivors the persecution did not end with their physical liberation or with their search for a psychological freedom in writing, so that Elie Wiesel comments of the inescapable loss created by his camp experience that now motivates his work, 'I am seeking my childhood. I will always be seeking it. I need it.'[37] The Holocaust created a multi layered identity for these survivor writers shaped by a continual transition in time through memory to a mythologised past, filtered through the reality of camp experience, to a future dominated by the need to write and to remember: 'If, by some miracle, I survive, I will devote my life to testifying on behalf of all those whose shadows will be bound to mine forever.'[38] Any assessment of testimony as a means to build a picture of liberation and its connections to Britain's *own* Holocaust will need to account for the complex identity of those Primo Levi would call, 'the witness writers'.[39]

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[35] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust.
For examples of accounts of liberation by Holocaust survivors see *Chapter Two* of this study.
[36] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, Author's Preface, p.15.
[37] Elie Wiesel, 'Making the Ghosts Speak', in The Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences, (Schocken Books, New York, 1990), p.135.
[38] Elie Wiesel, 'Why I write', in The Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences, p.15.
[39] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, p.398.

The voices of Holocaust survivors who witnessed liberation are also included here to provide a comparison with British reactions to the liberation of the concentration camps. In many ways the increased focus on the use of survivor testimony and the rise in the number of testimonies published has meant that the words and experiences of the liberators are overlooked. The need to account for the impact that the sights and sounds of liberation had on the British soldiers arriving at camps like Bergen Belsen is crucial. The effects of what they had witnessed in the camps often lasted for years to come after 1945. The presence of British soldiers in these camps allowed the British state to confirm the moral legitimacy of their war against the Nazis and to illustrate to the British people the moral bankruptcy of the German people. The inherent and assumed authority associated with the simple appearance of the British army uniform provided the British with the 'proof' they needed of German guilt. The soldiers' words, recorded in the press or on film from within the liberated camp, were bound in a powerful partnership with the photographs of the victims and survivors, photographs that were, as Barbie Zelizer has commented, 'splashed in prodigious numbers across the pages of the daily and weekly press'.[40] That partnership shaped British public responses to the first news of liberation and laid down the foundations for Britain's *own* interpretation of the Holocaust.

In *Chapter Three* the role of the British press in reporting and recording the immediate aftermath of the liberation of the camps is assessed. In Britain the liberation of Bergen Belsen brought reports and images that shocked and appalled the British public. The absence of any context in which to place the reports made it necessary to frame the camp and its victims in terms of German guilt and atrocity. For the British government that framework made it imperative that the images of atrocity provided by the liberation of Belsen be believed by the British public and so as *Chapter Three* explores, 'truth-telling' became all important in the reporting of 1945.[41] Belsen, or more accurately the Belsen of April 1945, was implanted in the minds of the British public and became the measure against which subsequent descriptions of the horrific, often in all areas of life, were tested. That process and the perpetrator centric context constructed by the British to use and control the images of

[40] Barbie Zelizer, Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye, p.12.
[41] See the words of Lord Denham included in *Chapter Three* of this study. Lord Denham, 'Buchenwald Camp,' Hansard, House of Lords, Volume 136, 1 May 1945.

liberation continued a trend laid down during the 1930s that disconnected the camp from any possibility of the recognition of a specific Jewish tragedy.[42]

2005 marked the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and of the liberation of the Nazi extermination and concentration camps. On 16 April 2005 The Times ran an article to mark the anniversary of the liberation by British troops of Bergen Belsen concentration camp. The newspaper had been at the forefront of reporting on the liberation of Belsen in the April of 1945. The nature and content of its 1945 coverage will be assessed further in *Chapter Three*. Britishness was at the centre of reporting on liberation in 1945. It remained at the centre of reporting on the anniversary of liberation in 2005. The article of 2005 illustrates the extent to which the events of liberation, and especially of the liberation of Bergen Belsen, continue to represent in concentrated form the complex nature of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Why? Because, despite its title, it is not an article about the Holocaust. It is not an article about Bergen Belsen. It is an article about Britain's role as liberators, about what it meant to be British in 1945 and what liberation confirms about what it means to be British today. It is an article that represents the construct of Britain's *own* Holocaust. The article is entitled, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'[43] That the headline should contain the four words 'Belsen', 'liberated', 'Britain' and 'Holocaust' provides the simplest and clearest evidence of their enduring indivisibility in terms of this country and this event. Their connection and use in this article reveals why the term 'bystander' could never do justice to Britain's multi layered relationship with the Holocaust.

To return to the title of the piece: the revelations of murderous neglect at Bergen Belsen that The Times and other newspapers brought to the British people in the spring of 1945 did undoubtedly shock and horrify and as Tony Kushner comments, 'it can never be emphasised too often that the dominant note struck by the British press

[42] For an account of the way in which Belsen or simply the word 'Belsen' entered British public consciousness and was used in a variety of contexts often completely distinct from the realities of the camp itself or from Jewish suffering see, Tony Kushner, 'From this Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business': History, Memory and Heritage, 1945 to 2005.'

[43] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain,' The Times, 16 April 2005.

in the presence of Nazi antisemitism was one of genuine moral outrage'.[44] And yet those revelations did not bring the facts and the details of the *Holocaust*, as we now know it, home to the British people, not just because the word and its present day meaning would have been alien to them. Indeed, writing with reference to America, Peter Novick has commented that, 'The Holocaust, as we speak of it today, was largely a retrospective construction, something that would not have been recognisable to most people at the time.'[45] The scenes of liberation did not mean that the British public as a whole recognised the true identity of the victims and survivors of camps like Belsen or the place of such camps in the destruction of European Jewry. Their shock here was not in response to scenes of Nazi antisemitism. As a result of the way in which the images of liberation were presented to the British public their shock was based both in a simple encounter with images of the horrific and in what they believed to be the farthest extremes of German brutality. What 'hit home' in Britain with the liberation of Belsen was the moral validity of the Second World War and the possibility that its much longed for conclusion might be on the horizon. The suffering of European Jews was presented and understood as part of the universal suffering of all of the Nazis' victims; the liberation of the camps as part of the liberation of Nazi dominated Europe. Whilst the liberation of Belsen *was* Britain's first physical encounter with the large-scale consequences of the Nazi extermination policy, it was not the first time, as the 2005 headline might suggest, that the reality of that policy had entered British state and popular consciousness. Yet the article follows a now reassuring path that asserts the still common notion that the liberation of Belsen represented Britain's 'discovery' of the destruction process; that only now was 'the Holocaust on British kitchen tables'.[46] As *Chapter Five* of this study will explore that concept of liberation as a 'discovery' shapes the representation of Britain's *own* Holocaust today in the form of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition. What is now referred to as the Holocaust was not, as the paper puts it, 'on British kitchen tables' in 1945. On a basic level what resided on those tables were images and reports of a brief moment in the lifespan of Bergen Belsen concentration camp. The framework constructed for those images allowed for another level of representation

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[44] Tony Kushner, 'The British and the Shoah', in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 23, Number 3, Autumn 1989), pp.3-16.
[45] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, (Bloomsbury, United States of America, 1999), p.20.
[46] Roger Boyes, When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'

that meant an image of German atrocity resided there also. Primarily what dominated those 'kitchen tables' in 1945 was a definition of Britishness that provided a reassurance and explanation for the disturbing images and details of liberation. It is perhaps noteworthy here that the 2005 article still uses an arguably distinctly British, normal, reassuring image in 'the kitchen table' to offset and to indicate the horror of the liberation imagery or what it inaccurately describes as 'the Holocaust'. Britishness remains the benchmark of normality by which to measure the awfulness of the event. Neither is its horror simply to be found in the facts of the destruction process. That horror, it seems, is only brought fully into view, both then and now, when it invades the sanctity of British domestic life. What the anniversary article illustrates is what time, memory and the struggle for cognitive control has done to the role of Belsen in Britain's *own* Holocaust narrative and memory.

In The Times article the words of Belsen survivor Ruth Turek provide an opportunity to confirm the status of the British soldiers as the long awaited saviours of the camp's prisoners, 'the soldiers seem to come like angels'. A study of survivors' memories of liberation will illustrate how a constructed image of the identity and behaviour of their liberators played an important part in their hopes for the day of liberation. However, those images were not always fulfilled nor, when they are placed in a wider assessment of the realities of liberation, are they always as unwaveringly positive as Turek's words might suggest. It may perhaps be assumed that in reading a newspaper report in 2005 the majority of the British public are not fully aware of an alternative interpretation of liberation. On a basic level it might be argued that the presence of the word 'liberated' and its associated positive imagery makes any alternative interpretation difficult. More significantly, an ambiguous or more complicated reading of the relationship between the liberator and the liberated is not part of the Holocaust they understand. It might be argued that the article's identification of Ruth Turek as Jewish and the use of her words as a starting point represent an important progression from the reporting of 1945 that was marked by the absence of any reference to Jews and Jewish suffering. This article, unlike its 1945 forerunner, is undoubtedly published against a backdrop of increased focus on what is now described as the Holocaust. That focus has identified Jews as victims of the Holocaust. It may even, as Tony Kushner has suggested in relation to the heritage industry's representation of Belsen, have created in the British public an *expectation*

of references to Jews in such articles.[47] However, that process cannot simply be read as the result of an increased *knowledge* or *understanding* of the Holocaust or as something that means the links between the universalising reporting of 1945 and today are severed. In this article, Turek's identity, one of two references to Jews *as Jews* in the work as a whole, is nevertheless still being used and controlled to allow the British public to understand and in this case, to confirm *their* role as the liberators of Bergen Belsen. Her identity is still secondary to her connection to the activities of her British liberators. Her words are not used to represent the suffering of Jews in Belsen. They are used to confirm that her liberators were not only the soldiers of the Second Army, but the British people as a whole, 'The day that **the British** saved the life of the 17 year old Polish Jew was also the day that the Holocaust **came home to Britain.**'[48] (my emphasis). The focus on Britain's liberating role also means that Turek's words represent a further opportunity to reconfirm the identity and status of the perpetrators. In 2005, just as it had been in 1945, Britain's role as liberator and rescuer in Belsen cancels out any need to assess or question the country's role and actions during the years when the destruction process had been ongoing. Today Britain's representation of its *own* Holocaust does not begin with the struggles of refugee workers like Eleanor Rathbone or James Parkes or with the inadequacies of the Evian and Bermuda conferences. It begins with the unquestionably positive image of the liberating nation laid down in Belsen in that spring of 1945. Indeed, even as Stephen Smith of the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre goes on to tell The Times journalist in 2005, the relationship between Britain and the camp may still override the images of the victims themselves, 'it was Belsen rather than Auschwitz which represented the Holocaust. **Not just** (my emphasis) because of the horrific skeletal pictures, but also because it was so connected to my own country'.[49] It was, of course, Belsen's liberation that was connected to Britain and yet it was, for Smith, that moment, so unlike every other during both Belsen's own history and indeed during the Holocaust, that came to represent the destruction process as a whole. It did so because of its connection to British experience.

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[47] See Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business,' p.26.
[48] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'
[49] Stephen Smith in Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'

The undoubted sense of newness, of shock created by the images of the camp's liberation is returned to in the 2005 article through a focus on what the newspaper refers to as 'the gritty photographs' of Belsen sent across the world during April 1945. If as Susan Sontag has argued, 'Photographs cannot create a moral position. But they can reinforce one', then the use of these images in 2005 is as revealing with regard to Britain's relationship with the destruction process as it had been in 1945.[50] Some of those images are once more present in the 2005 article and more importantly perhaps, are still accompanied by their original headline 'German Concentration and Labour Camps'. The headline shows the absence of any reference to Jews and Britain's increasing focus on German rather than just Nazi criminality in 1945. Its use suggests that sixty years on any representation of 1945 still prompts a British focus on 'the Germans', rather than the Nazis specifically. Also now, as then, the images offer an opportunity to reassert Britain's role in a just and valid war. The article repeats the words of the British soldier shown in the film reels made of the camp at liberation, 'Now I know what we were fighting for.'[51] The article provides the British public with the opportunity to share and confirm that knowledge and conviction sixty years on. The same reel of film recording Gunner Illingworth's words is shown in the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition today. Smith argues in the 2005 article that soldiers returning to Britain having seen Belsen 'sent a powerful word of mouth message' and they did. But it was not a message about the Holocaust, as the article's title would have us believe. Grounded in the soldiers' real horror and in some cases lasting trauma at what they had seen, it was a message that confirmed a belief in German brutality and in a British moral victory.

For some liberating soldiers their experience of Belsen would determine their attitudes towards German people for a lifetime. On 26 November 1988 the actor and writer Dirk Bogarde wrote his regular book review for The Daily Telegraph. His piece was entitled 'Out of the Shadows of Hell' and was a review of three recently published Holocaust related texts.[52] As Mark Connelly has noted in his recent work

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[50] Susan Sontag, On Photography, (Anchor Books, New York, 1977), p.17.
[51] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'
[52] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell', The Daily Telegraph, 26 November 1988, reproduced in the collection of Bogarde's articles and reviews for the paper, For the Time Being: Collected Journalism, (Viking, London, 1998), p.143.
The books under review in Bogarde's piece were: Anton Gill, The Journey back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors, (Grafton, London, 1988) and Henry Orenstein, I

on Britain and its Second World War memory, Bogarde was one of a select number of former soldiers who became actors. Alongside perhaps most famously John Mills and Richard Todd, Bogarde often featured in the war themed films that were hugely popular in early 1950s British society. The image of the British soldier that such films 'validated by popular approval' remains central to Britain's wartime memory.[53] Bogarde's later writing raises in concentrated form some of the questions regarding Britain, Belsen and the Holocaust that are at the heart of this project. Bogarde had been part of the British Army contingent that reached Bergen Belsen in the spring of 1945. Bogarde tells us that he and his fellow soldiers had been aware of the existence of camps, 'but it didn't really occur to me that through the greening larches and under a clear, hard blue sky, the last traces of snow melting in the woods, I would be entering a hell which I shall never forget and about which for many years, I would be unable to speak'.[54] He admits that 'reluctantly, I have agreed to read three books on the subject of the final extermination of the Jews'.[55] He explains his reluctance as the legacy of a struggle to come to terms with what he had seen in the camp: 'perhaps if I'd had a drop too much, I might try to explain and usually end in unmanly tears'.[56] Bogarde is clear on the identity of Belsen's victims. It is perhaps difficult to distinguish how far that insight had been granted him by the growing interest in the Holocaust by the 1980s or whether that awareness was with him in Belsen in 1945; 'There were all kinds of people, Albanians, Dutch, Greeks, Italians, French, gypsies, socialists, homosexuals – all manner of men and women who had been rounded up. But, mainly, they **were** Jews.'[57] (emphasis in the original). There are other moments during the review that suggest Bogarde has been granted the opportunity to fill in the gaps with regard to the destruction process with information he was unlikely to have been armed with in Belsen in 1945.[58] Whether Bogarde was as sure about Belsen's

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Shall Live: Surviving the Holocaust 1939 – 1945, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988) and Antony Polonsky, (ed), A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto: Abraham Lewin, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1988).

[53] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Pearson Longman, London, 2004), Connelly notes that, 'in 1951 the top British box-office stars were those found most often in uniform: John Mills, Jack Hawkins, Trevor Howard, Richard Todd, Dirk Bogarde, Jack Warner and Leo Genn,' p.200.

[54] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell', p.143.

[55] ibid, p.143.

[56] ibid, p.143.

[57] ibid, p.144.

[58] For example, Bogarde is able to comment that, 'Belsen was not an extermination camp. They just got it so overcrowded moving people away from the Russian advance' p.143 and ' Belsen was a holiday camp in comparison to Treblinka – they drove the naked Jews into pits which they had had to dig

primary (and secondary) victims in 1945 as he is more than forty year later is unclear but ultimately Jews and Jewish suffering are not the central focus of his Belsen memory. It is the Germans that dominate Bogarde's memory and representation of his Belsen experience. Commenting on the survivor testimony collection under review, Bogarde states, 'the absolute terror and fear of the Germans still persists, not so much for the younger Germans, who could not be held responsible, but for the big, noisy Germans, male and female, of that hideous generation'.[59] Bogarde shares the horror of Germans that he believes he can see in the survivors' testimony; 'They are still there: I have seen them and I too feel fear and revulsion.'[60] He is unreserved in his hatred for German people. Many in Britain shared his feelings in 1945. Belsen and its liberation confirmed that feeling. Whilst in present day Britain Bogarde's unreserved and published comments about Germans may seem striking, it is arguable that anti German feeling remains a strong feature of British identity today. For Bogarde in the late 1980s Belsen is still a statement of German atrocity just as it had been for so many in Britain at its liberation. For Britain in the twenty first century and even in the era of a British Holocaust Memorial Day that appears to centralise Holocaust survivors, that may still be the case. The challenges and ambiguities regarding the Holocaust that are undoubtedly generated by the books he is reviewing can do nothing to shake that conviction. Note that Belsen is not the subject of any of the books Bogarde has been asked to discuss. Indeed their contents exist only at the margins of this piece. And yet it is his experience as one of Belsen's liberators that dominates his response to the subject of the Holocaust. What the texts do is to return him to his *own* Holocaust defined by the events of 1945 and grounded in that moment in Belsen. And when he remembers Belsen, he remembers Germans. That is not rooted in a cynical disregard for the victims of the camp or of the Holocaust as a whole. Indeed he writes movingly of survivors' calmness and bravery. But at moments in the review their suffering and crucially that of the murdered at Belsen is secondary to his intense anger at the German perpetrators; 'Well: all right. Now we know what happened to the Jews in detail. We know how many were destroyed, how few survived...but the absolute terror and fear of the Germans still persists.'[61] The victims and survivors of Belsen

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themselves to the blaring of dance music and jolly marching songs: 17,000 were finished off in this way.' p.146.

[59] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell,' p.144.

[60] ibid, p.144.

[61] ibid, p.144.

had played the same part for the British people and for the British state in 1945. A failure to identify their Jewishness did not preclude genuine horror and real sympathy for the victims; the anger at, and fixation with German monstrousness just came first. A universalising approach in place since the 1930s made any recogrition of the specific fate of a particular victim group impossible.

It is important that at no point during his piece does Bogarde use the word 'Nazi' to refer to the perpetrators. He often just uses the word 'they'. It is as though his anger prevents him from finding any more specific, elaborate or *human* description for those responsible for Belsen. A lack of adequate language in the face of Belsen and indeed in the face of the Holocaust was, and is, a common response. In many ways what makes Bogarde's response so powerful is that it appears as though anger and the memory of Belsen are effectively disarming an otherwise eloquent writer. Undoubtedly Bogarde is angry but here his choice of words may still be conscious and deliberate. The implication is that the perpetrators and their behaviour are *beyond* description. More specifically the strained use of words suggests that the perpetrators' actions are beyond any language that might ground them in the world of men, as opposed to that of animals or even of the unearthly or the monstrous. Gunner Illingworth's words give the people of Britain the same impression, both in 1945 and today as they are played in the Imperial War Museum; 'The things that they've committed, well, nobody would think they were human at all.'[62] That image of the Germans, tracing its roots to the atrocity stories of 1914 – 1918, was again to be very much present in British responses to liberation in 1945.

Once again definitions of Britishness are at the core of Bogarde's piece. It is when Bogarde's memory of Belsen coincides with his perception of his own country that he is most traumatised. Here too that association is intimately connected with the impact that Belsen has on the familiar in Bogarde's life. Echoing the 'kitchen tables' of The Times article that 'familiar' is grounded in the domestic sphere of British life. Bogarde both measures and copes with the memory of Belsen through the prism of personal experience. He writes of two servants from Vienna he had in the 1950s and 1960s; 'He had fought, and was severely wounded, at Stalingrad. Gentle, kind, warm

[62] Gunner Illingworth, Movietone, Belsen, 23 – 24 April 1945, (Imperial War Museum, Department of Film), cited in Ben Shephard, After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen 1945, p.75.

and deeply loving, they were part of my life for eleven years. Eventually they found a better job. I took them, weeping, to the boat train and helped them with their luggage into the compartment. There were two rabbis sitting in a corner. Helmut spat viciously into both their faces, and with his sobbing wife, sat on his luggage in the corridor all the way to Southampton.'[63] It is possible that the memory of this incident is traumatic for Bogarde on multiple levels and not solely as an illustration of antisemitism. Firstly, it is noteworthy that he should be comfortable with Viennese servants and with an individual who had fought at Stalingrad, presumably against the Allies. His positive relationship with these individuals would seem to confirm his belief that the perpetrators behind Belsen and indeed the Second World War were *Germans* and not Nazis. His memory of Belsen is drawn into focus when antisemitism becomes part of his everyday world. The nastiness of the situation is to be found not just in its face value but also in the stark contrast Bogarde seems to suggest between the Britishness of the boat train setting, the sanctity of the employer/servant relationship and the sudden *foreign* presence of antisemitism. Most importantly, note that in using this incident to try and illustrate the existence of antisemitism, 'even here in our own country, Great Britain', Bogarde has not used an example of *British* antisemitism – his servants are from Vienna.[64] The setting is British, the antisemitic behaviour mars that British setting, but the antisemitism itself is not British. Belsen and the antisemitism that Bogarde associates with it seem to be the product of a foreign hatred. Bogarde writes about the possibility of antisemitism in Britain. He does not concede to the possibility of *British* antisemitism.

Belsen does force Bogarde to ask 'could it happen here?' His recollection of his fellow soldiers' response in 1945 haunts him and is worth including here in full; 'And could it happen here? In England's green and pleasant land, we asked each other this, in the jeep bumping back from the camp, and we agreed, in 1945, that, yes it could. 'Wembley Stadium to start with, then shove them all off to Catterick Camp or any other military hell hole; you'd get all the guards you needed to beat the hell out of them and then ship them back to wherever they came from.'[65] Bogarde comments of that conversation that 'I was swimming with tears, sick twice, and dreamt of it all for

[63] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell,' p.145.
[64] ibid, p.145.
[65] ibid, p.146.

nights and months of nights.'[66] It is the suggestion that British people could become perpetrators that so upsets Bogarde. The horror of Belsen is again only truly understood when it is transferred in Bogarde's imagination to the landmarks and settings of Britain. Bogarde is thus distanced from the realities of Belsen and its victims and focuses instead on what such things might mean for 'England's green and pleasant land'. It is perhaps interesting to observe that Blake's iconic imagery remained very much present during Belsen's liberation anniversary year as *Jerusalem* became the anthem to Britain's major sporting and commemorative events in 2005. Bogarde recalls that the soldiers all agreed with the suggestion but ultimately the reader is left unconvinced as to how far Bogarde can bring himself to believe in the possibility that British people may have the same capacity for destructive evil as the Germans he so hates and fears. In the conclusion to his review Bogarde returns to the Germans. He recognises that his age may have determined some of his response to the camp, 'I was twenty-four then; now I am sixty-seven. My actions are a little more controlled', but the years have not changed his attitude towards Germans, 'I just leave the elevator if a German enters. It's the voice which disturbs me so dreadfully.' He describes this as 'rather a futile gesture, but I make it none the less'.[67] Finally it is significant that Bogarde suggests that his British readers will share his German centred response to the texts under review; 'These three books might have the same effect on you.'[68] In reviewing books about the Holocaust, Dirk Bogarde, a liberator, is returned to Bergen Belsen, its liberation and its perpetrators. His conviction is that the British public, members of a liberating nation, will do the same.

In the anniversary year of 2005 the connections between Britain's *own* Holocaust and its experience and memory of the Second World War were as strong as ever. The way in which Britain remembers the Second World War permeates The Times article on Belsen's liberation in 2005 with its focus on the British Army soldiers, their shock and long-term struggle with the memory of the camp. The scale of the destruction in the camp is still measured by the impact it had on battle weary British soldiers, 'the shock permeated first through the accounts of liberating soldiers, members of the

[66] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell,' p.146.
[67] ibid, p.146.
[68] ibid, p.146.

Second Army who had seen some savage fighting'.[69] The context for explaining their shock is found in their experiences *before* Belsen. That shock is a means to reassert their bravery and to hint at the horrors they had *already* endured. The reference to the soldiers' experience of 'savage fighting' here arguably distances the reader further from Belsen and the realities of its liberation. The reference to fighting and the focus on the soldiers allows Belsen to become part of the Second World War, not of a unique destruction process that reached its conclusion under the cover of that war. The 2005 Belsen article maintains Bogarde's focus on the Germans. The piece shares the page with a smaller article about the 60th anniversary of the liberation of British prisoners of war at Colditz. Colditz is a location that conjures images of British wartime heroism and suffering. The paper describes the castle as holding 'an elite group of officer prisoners' and as the 'scene of some of the most daring escape attempts of the Second World War'.[70] Arguably, the reference to the minority experience of escape at Colditz does an injustice to the majority experience of long-term imprisonment for British captives. The implications of a focus on heroic escape are just as profound for a representation of Belsen. Belsen is once more effectively incorporated into the familiar British narrative of the Second World War. References to the camp must share their space with those regarding British wartime activity and crucially, British suffering at the hands of the Germans. The close association of two pieces dealing with prisoners, captivity, escape and rescue allows the crucial differences between the prisoners of Belsen and those of Colditz to be blurred. *Chapter Three* reveals how far the roots of that continued partnership in the minds of the British public between the experiences of POWs and those of the prisoners of Belsen could be found in the press coverage of liberation in 1945. In 2006 the partnership remains as the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum shares visitors' attention with an exhibition entitled, *Great Escapes* that details 'the extraordinary escape attempts made by Allied service men from German prisoner of war camps' and where visitors 'can find out fascinating facts about escape attempts and use their ingenuity to make their own escape from Colditz'.[71]

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[69] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'
[70] 'Colditz veterans return to castle prison,' in The Times, 16 April 2005.
[71] *Great Escapes* runs at the Imperial War Museum until September 2006. The exhibition is accompanied by regular screenings of the Dreamworks animated film, Chicken Run, (2000).

What have become some of the foremost images of Britain's construction of a Holocaust memory are also to be found in The Times article. The British soldier who drove one of the bulldozers used in Bergen Belsen to move and bury thousands of corpses, is referred to. It is, however, Frank Chapman's struggle to cope with the demands of his role in Belsen that is focused upon, 'Frank Chapman, who drove the bulldozer that piled the naked corpses into communal graves, remained scarred by his camp experience until his death 18 months ago.'[72] In 2005, as in 1945, and in The Times article whose title even uses the word 'Holocaust', the victims of Bergen Belsen being moved by Chapman's bulldozer remain naked and nameless alongside the 'camp experience' of a British soldier and the bravery of his Colditz wartime comrades. As we shall see in *Chapter Five*, the image of the British Tommy and the bulldozer in Bergen Belsen dominates the liberation section of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition today. In its references to the images of the starving, the article still firstly asserts the struggles of the British people, 'The British at home, though battered, had no previous idea of how it looked to die of hunger.'[73] The impact of the camp upon the British soldiers and more importantly on their British sense of right and wrong is emphasised just as it had been in 1945. The 2005 Times article refers to the camp commander Josef Kramer and to the camp warden Irme Grese, both of whom fascinated the British newspaper readers in the spring of 1945. Indeed the fact that female guards were found in camps like Belsen horrified the British public and again seemed to signal the depths of German depravity. For liberator Dirk Bogarde, the image of the Nazi women remained with him; 'that terrible April day in '45..watching the cheerful women guards, trim and neat in uniform, blond hair in immaculate waves and curls, red nail varnish gleaming, chucking (two to a corpse) the dead into pits squashy with slime and decay'.[74] In 2005, The Times article uses the words of the British commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Taylor who reportedly said of Kramer, 'tell him that when he hangs I hope he hangs slowly'. The paper comments, 'British officers did not usually talk like that in the presence of reporters'.[75] In 2005 the extent of the moral outrage that is represented by Belsen is still, it seems, best conveyed to the British public in terms of the impact

[72] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'
[73] ibid.
[74] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell,' p.145.
[75] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'

it had on one of the clearest symbols of British manners, decorum, and indeed of British identity; the figure of a British army officer.

Following the tone of the reporting of 1945, with the exception of the words of Ruth Turek, the identities and words of victims and survivors of Belsen remain absent from this piece. Instead, now as then, they appear faceless, existing only in terms of the evidence of their destruction and the record of that destruction, 'The piles of corpses; the sweet stench of decaying flesh; the dazed, emaciated inmates; they became almost instantly part of the iconography of war crimes.'[76] They are the images that make up the 'stomach-curdling footage' of the Army film units. In the words that it seems are impossible to avoid in an article about Belsen, both then and now, they are the 'naked bodies with missing hearts and livers, clearly cannibalised'.[77] Interestingly, it is only their direct connection to Britain's experience in the camp as acted out by the soldiers that gives the victims any sense of identity in this 2005 article. Ruth Turek is only named and her tearful response only recorded when she recalls her 'angel' soldiers. Former Belsen inmate Renee is mentioned because she is now the wife of military policeman and liberator, Charles, 'Belsen brought them together'.[78] It seems the story of a relationship between prisoner and liberator is, like the bulldozer and cannibalism, required material in any account of Belsen. Just as it had done in 1945, The Times does point out the most 'famous' victims of Belsen for its contemporary British readers. Today, the first amongst these is Anne Frank, referred to here as 'the Dutch schoolgirl' and the paper comments that she 'was the most prominent victim of Belsen'. Anne is arguably the most prominent victim of the Holocaust. Yet her Jewishness is as absent from the record in 2005 as it would perhaps have been in 1945. The thesis will consider whether the roots of what Robert Abzug has called 'the peculiar attitude that took hold both in the West and among the Soviets during the liberations of the extermination and concentration camps; a relative blindness to Jewish victims as Jews' can be traced to a specific and enduring British response to Jews and to the physical evidence of the destruction process.[79] After Anne, the paper returns to the liberators and suggests that it is the later prominence of some members

[76] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'
[77] ibid.
[78] ibid.
[79] Robert Abzug, 'The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps; Understanding and Using History,' p.5.

of the liberating team as opposed to the victims and survivors that 'ensured Belsen continued to shape the consciousness of a generation'. There is perhaps a suggestion of a still inescapable temptation to look for a positive or a redemptive ending to the story of Belsen. Following a trend set down in 1945 to focus upon the future and not the past, the article points out that, 'among the liberating soldiers was Chaim Herzog, later President of Israel'. As *Chapter Four* of the study will explore a focus on the future was very much a part of Anglo – Jewish response to the news and images that liberation and 1945 were to bring. In turn much of that focus would centre on the role Palestine or the possibility of a new Jewish state should play in the provision of support for survivors. The responses of British Jews to the destruction process and its aftermath have been the subject of debate. For Richard Bolchover in his 1993 work, British Jewry and the Holocaust Anglo – Jewish response was inadequate and limited by internal dispute and competing priorities.[80] In 2002 Pamela Shatzkes attempted what she regarded as a more positive reading of British Jewish actions in the face of the Holocaust. In Holocaust and Rescue: Impotent or Indifferent? Anglo – Jewry 1938 – 45 Shatzkes argued that 'rather than being insecure and pusillanimous, Anglo – Jewry was a confident, well integrated community'.[81] Here, a close reading of the writings, responses and actions of British Jewry will focus on the way in which their Britishness and their attempt to place the destruction process in the familiar shaped their understanding of the Holocaust.

A need to finish on a more positive note is returned to in the newspaper article's conclusion and the words of the only other Jewish survivor named as such in the piece, Anita Lasker Wallfisch. Wallfisch gave an interview to the BBC in Bergen Belsen, of which she says, 'it was repeated several times and showed the people in England that it was possible to be Jewish in Germany and still be alive'.[82] In the Britain of 1945 the extent to which the report achieved the level of understanding with regard to Jewish suffering that Wallfisch suggests is questionable. The liberation of camps like Belsen focused the British on the conditions in the western European concentration camps and allowed for the continuation of a focus upon Nazi violence

[80] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993).
[81] Pamela Shatzkes, Holocaust and Rescue: Impotent or Indifferent? Anglo – Jewry 1938 – 45, (Palgrave, London, 2002), p.5.
[82] Anita Lasker Wallfisch as quoted in Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain.'

in Germany. If the British people did recognise the existence of Jewish survivors in Germany, then they did so without an accompanying recognition of the totality of what we now call the Holocaust, so that Tony Kushner concludes, that whilst 'few people could be found who were not influenced by the disclosures' nevertheless, 'through a combination of factors, all of which relate to British liberalism, the Jewish aspect of Nazi atrocities would remain unexplored for some time in the post-war world'.[83]

Ultimately what the words of liberators like Bogarde and those of the anniversary article illustrate is that Britain's relationship with the Holocaust and the construction of its *own* Holocaust is revealed in the action of an individual, in the use of a single word, in the content of an article, in the presentation of an image, in the positioning of an artefact and in the changing nature of what it means to be British. As *Chapter One* of this study will explore, that relationship began in 1933.

[83] Tony Kushner, 'The British and the Shoah,' p.11.

Chapter One

'My Question Applies to this Country'
Britain, Europe's Jews and the Beginning of a Relationship

On 23 March 1943, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in his capacity as the Vice President of a newly formed pro – refugee group, addressed the House of Lords on the subject of 'German atrocities and aid for refugees,' 'My whole plea on behalf of those for whom I speak is that whether what we do be large or little, it should at least be all that we can do.'[1] To ensure that Britain was to do all that it could with regard to the Nazi persecution of the Jews would, through a sustained public campaign, be the self-defining commitment of that newly formed group. The group called itself The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror. The Committee counted amongst its members two Archbishops, a chief Rabbi and staunch supporters of the refugee cause. Foremost amongst these were the Reverend James Parkes, publisher Victor Gollancz and especially Eleanor Rathbone, the women's rights campaigner and MP for the Combined Universities. Rathbone, the only suffragist to become an MP, was the Committee's voice in Parliament as the debate over refugees and rescue became a major concern in British society during the crucial months between the United Nations Allied Declaration of December 1942 and the parliamentary debate on 'The Refugee Problem' of May 1943.[2]

The Committee's attempt to place the plight of the Jews of Europe on the British national agenda represents their own unique attempt to bring under 'cognitive control' the knowledge that a considerable foresight regarding events in Europe had brought them.[3] They also aimed to share their knowledge with the British public. Their search for that cognitive control, for a context and meaning for the situation in Europe, was grounded in their understanding of Britishness. Their recognition of the unique aspects of Nazi policy towards Jews was combined with a commitment to notions of

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[1] Lord Archbishop of Canterbury 'German Atrocities; Aid for Refugees,' Hansard, House of Lords, Volume 126, 23 March 1943.
[2] For a more detailed reading of Eleanor Rathbone's role in women's politics in Britain see, Johanna Alberti, Eleanor Rathbone, (Sage, London, 1996).
[3] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence; Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain, 1945-6' in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), pp.13-29.

British identity that, as Johanna Alberti writes of Eleanor Rathbone's personal outlook, 'imagined 'the nation' as a site of moral behaviour'.[4] That interpretation of nationhood and of the nature of individual and national responsibility drove their campaign. The pro-refugee campaigners were determined that Britain should recognise what they regarded as a British national duty and responsibility to make every effort to ease the suffering of European Jewry. That determination illustrates the primary connection between their understanding of events in Europe and their understanding of what it meant to be British in the 1930s and 1940s. Their work reveals not only the singular position they themselves occupied in British society. The relationship between the Committee and their own country also serves as a window upon Britain's first encounter with the destruction process. It reveals the events, attitudes and responses that became the building blocks of Britain's *own* construction of the Holocaust.

From 1933 British state and popular responses to the Nazis' anti-Jewish behaviour and to the ensuing refugee crisis were 'channelled through domestic ideological considerations'.[5] State reactions were shaped by the tenets of immigration legislation and procedures laid down after 1919 that emphasised the admission of 'desirable' individuals and importantly reacted to each potential admission case on an individual basis. Immigration policy was also designed to protect an increasingly narrow definition of Britishness and remained unchanged until 1938. The finer detail of Britain's immigration legislation in the years before the Second World War is explored in Louise London's intricate analysis of Whitehall and the Jews and is not therefore the focus of this chapter.[6] However the unbalanced relationship between British state and popular response is crucial in illustrating the complex nature of Britain's engagement with the Holocaust before 1945. When first confronted with the Nazi regime the British people sought rational explanations for the Nazis' irrational actions. They looked for those explanations both in an exclusivist definition of British identity and in a liberal ideology that could not account for the particularism or scale of Nazi antisemitism. Whilst many in British society accepted without need for further explanation the notion that 'the Jew' and crucially his assimilation into wider

[4] Johanna Alberti, Eleanor Rathbone, p.128.
[5] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), p.36.
[6] Louise London, Whitehall and the Jews 1933 – 1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000).

society represented a social problem, few could understand the Nazis' all consuming attack on Jewish life in Germany. Attempts to understand led the often sympathetic and curious, sometimes distracted and disinterested British public to a mixture of conclusions about the new regime in Germany and its racial ideology. These ranged from a belief that Jews in Germany and those forced to leave were in some way responsible for their treatment to the idea that stories of atrocity from Germany were exaggerated or isolated incidents. Still others argued that the Jews of Germany were the concern of the German government and that the British could not be seen to interfere. A small, but significant minority, as explored in this chapter, recognised the totality of the Nazis' approach and its consequences both for its victims and for the British nation. However, as a result of unbalanced press reporting and in the absence of a direct response from those in power in Britain in the years before the Second World War, 'whilst most people were aware that the Jews were being treated badly by the Nazi regime, their understanding of the situation did not go much further'.[7] During the 1930s the British public watched the Nazi regime and its unfolding policy of anti-Jewish persecution. They drew on the ethos of their national narrative in response thus beginning processes of understanding and misunderstanding filtered through prisms of Britishness that are still ongoing.

For the future members of the National Committee, British action in response to the growing information regarding events in Europe meant rescue, a term which would take on a multiplicity of connotations during the period. Both the very definition of rescue in this context and the feasibility of any Allied involvement in the rescue of Europe's Jews occupy an important place in the historiography of Allied response to the Holocaust. Historical debate, for example, still surrounds the question of Allied involvement in a bombing raid on Auschwitz Birkenau. In a recent publication in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum historians have offered a variety of perspectives on the practical and ideological issues associated with the bombing of the extermination centre.[8] The plight of Hungary's Jews, some of the last victims of Auschwitz during late 1944, is often highlighted as a missed opportunity for rescue on the part of the Allies, whilst the success of *any* possible

[7] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.48.
[8] Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, (eds), The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies have attempted it? (University of Kansas Press, London, 2003. Originally published St. Martin's, New York, 2000).

rescue plan has recently been controversially drawn into question.[9] The Committee members believed in the feasibility of the rescue of Jews from Nazi occupied Europe. They formed those beliefs into a coherent rescue plan. They recognised the difficulties involved and the limited impact any aid could have against the scale of the destruction process, but their main objective was 'to show that something can be done'.[10] They subsequently faced the gradual realisation that their commitment to rescue was unmatched amongst those who may have had the power to act upon it. The Committee's views were well represented in the Commons by Eleanor Rathbone and others. Important members of the House of Lords shared their opinions on the refugee crisis. However the majority of their campaigners were disconnected from the sources of political power in Britain. Their status as outsiders allowed them an important freedom of thought and expression in response to the destruction process. It also posed a limitation to their ability to realise change in the attitude of the British state. As the destruction process continued to develop, the Committee members and supporters gradually came to understand that their interpretation of what an appropriate British response should be was not always shared by all of British society. The Committee's relationship with those in power was defined by this distinction as the British Government sought and found its own understanding of what Britain's relationship with the plight of Europe's Jews should be.

The Committee's numerous publications, their regular bulletin, News From Hitler's Europe and their reactions to the major events of the rescue debate in Britain illustrate their understanding of the concept of rescue. They provide insight into the Committee's aims and the objectives they set for the practical application of their beliefs. Those objectives took the form of detailed plans for rescue and were based on levels of information gathering that not only prove the commitment of individuals like Gollancz and Parkes to the cause, but also illustrate the amount of information about the fate of Europe's Jews that was accessible in Britain during the years before 1945. The Committee sought approval for their plans for rescue from both the British

[9] On the situation of Jews in Hungary see for example, David Cesarani, Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944, (Berg, Oxford, 1997). William Rubinstein's controversial theory that no plan for rescue by the Allies could have saved more Jews from Hitler's Europe is contained in his work, The Myth of Rescue: Why the democracies could not have saved more Jews from the Nazis, (Routledge, London, 1997).

[10] National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, News From Hitler's Europe, 22 February 1944, (MS Parkes Papers, University of Southampton Special Collections).

government and the British people during the years of the Holocaust. Their work and ideas were presented to both groups in a sustained campaign of publications, leaflets, parliamentary questions and meetings from the Committee's inception and until 1946. For Eleanor Rathbone the 'refugee question' 'remained a preoccupation until the day of her death. It filled her letter bag, multiplied her journeyings, depleted her purse, brought her into perpetual argument with the Home Office, and impelled her to remark rather wearily towards the close of her life: "I sometimes think I have become MP for refugees".[11] A comparison of the manner in which rescue was understood and reported in the British national press in light of the Committee's publications indicates the impact of the rescue debate on British society. That comparison also sheds light on the place of rescue in the 'important battleground' that the question of knowledge and understanding occupies today in the study of Allied responses to the destruction of European Jewry.[12] It may go further to illustrate the way in which both the Committee and the British public filtered the question of rescue and the growing details of the destruction process through a perception of themselves as English men and women. The experiences of the Committee reveal that the concept of rescue, both then and now, is open to multiple interpretations. In Britain the debate over the rescue of Europe's Jews went beyond the issue of feasibility and logistics to become a statement on national identity. The work of pro-refugee campaigners like the National Committee represents an important meeting point between Britain and the Holocaust *during* the years when the destruction process was ongoing.

Within the Committee's period of activity, the subject of rescue was a site for the expression of enduring negative attitudes towards Jews and refugees and for disbelief with regard to the details of the 'Final Solution'. For some sections of the British government, the notion of rescue generated unsettling discussion regarding the practice and outcome of the war effort and cast doubt over Britain's position in the post-war world. Rescue illustrates how the first challenges that the Holocaust posed to a British understanding of the world were met with a response that relied on definitions of what it meant to be British or more specifically often, what it meant to be English. It was a focus on British identity from which the Committee themselves could not be disentangled. If Jewish refugees and their rescue were at the centre of the

[11] Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1949), p.226.
[12] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.121.

Committee's thoughts, then no less so would be the maintenance and protection of what James Parkes would call, 'our honour and sincerity'.[13] For Eleanor Rathbone, honour was something 'without which, properly interpreted, life is not worth living, either for a nation or an individual'.[14] For the Committee, the debate over rescue could not and would not end with the victims of Nazi persecution if it did not firstly begin with the rescue of the liberal British identity, sense of honour, humanitarianism and justice in which the Committee saw the essence of the British character and to which they themselves were faithful. Rathbone 'understood the British character to be both 'natural' and the result of a long process of cultural development'.[15] In the atmosphere of the rescue debate it was this very identity that the Committee felt was threatened by British state inactivity in the face of the Jewish disaster. For Parkes, Rathbone and Gollancz there was a clear relationship between Britain and the Holocaust from the very beginning. The British government too sensed that the destruction process and the need to make some kind of response to it threatened their own adherence to liberal principals and to their own definition of Britishness. The roots of Britain's response to rescue and to its first attempt to bring the destruction process under the controlling influence of its own national narrative are traceable to the differing interpretations of how to counter that threat. Those differences defined the Committee's relationship with the Government as both acted from within a shared focus on British identity, only to reach conflicting conclusions on the question of rescue with long term implications for Britain's *own* understanding of the Holocaust.

Rescue did not end with a debate over practicalities but extended to become an arena for international politics and for the expression of national fears and frustrations. In pressing for action the Committee faced a dual obstacle. First, the Nazis' continuing and total policy of extermination made rescue a race against time. Second, the concept of rescue raised a complex mix of national issues, often economic and political in origin, in British society and the Committee members would have to address and deal with these frequently. The Committee operated in the moment of time before rescue was subsumed by those external challenges, when rescue and the fate of European Jewry occupied a central position in British popular and governmental thinking. It

[13] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews – Future Vengeance or Present Help?' January 1943, unpublished, (MS 60 9/5/1, Parkes Papers, University of Southampton Special Collections).
[14] Eleanor Rathbone, Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 326, 19 July 1937.
[15] Johanna Alberti, Eleanor Rathbone, p.127.

was not to be the moment of opportunity for rescue for which the Committee hoped. The reasons for the Committee's eventual failure must be assessed. Yet what is perhaps more revealing in providing access to the nature of British reactions to the Holocaust is an attempt to understand why the Committee was prompted to try. Britishness was a key factor in their reasons for acting in the name of a rescue attempt in the first place. Britishness also lay at the root of their motivation to keep trying.

As Tony Kushner comments, 'By the time of the Allied Declaration, most of Polish Jewry had been destroyed and the mass deportations of West European Jews had been in operation for six months.'[16] Throughout 1941 and 1942 reports and information from Europe regarding the plight of the Jews became increasingly detailed as a picture of the Final Solution was slowly pieced together and interpreted by the British people. In November 1941, 'the British minister in Berne, D.V.Kelly, reported that a Polish informant had told him that about 1.5 million Jews who were living in Eastern Poland have simply disappeared altogether; nobody knows where or how'.[17] In the early months of 1942 the Jewish Chronicle published reports of mass deportations and massacres. In August 1942, the Foreign Office received reports from the Swiss representative of the World Jewish Congress Gerhard Reigner. In these reports Reigner stated that a plan for the systematic extermination of the Jews of Europe was under Nazi consideration. The plan had already been implemented by the time London received Reigner's reports. These reports and the many other pieces of information that the British received at this time were often met with an unwillingness to accept their content at face value. The specifically anti-Jewish nature of the persecution and its sustained and systematic form also went largely unconsidered so that Wasserstein comments that the information was treated with 'a certain scepticism' and 'a cautious reserve'.[18] A connection was often made between the content of the reports and the atrocity propaganda of the First World War. As a result the British Government's reaction to the news from Europe was frequently shaped by 'a widespread aversion from falling into the same error again'.[19] The legacy of the propaganda of the First World War meant that in putting their rescue campaign to the

[16] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.173.
[17] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939 – 1945, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979), p.167.
[18] ibid, p.167.
[19] ibid, p.167.

British people the Committee would often have to overcome doubts about the very necessity of their cause and their proposals. James Parkes recognised the long term effects of the British people's memory of the Great War propaganda in their first responses to the news from Nazi Europe; 'men were sated with war horrors, and they were sceptical. It savoured of atrocity stories. It passed beyond human imagination'.[20] Whilst doubts remained amongst some sections of Whitehall and the British public, doubts whose roots often lay in long term British conceptions of Jews, 'by autumn 1942, the weight of evidence from all sources confirming the Nazi massacre of Jews compelled the British government to shift from its previous position of studious avoidance of any explicit reference to the matter'.[21] The information from Europe was combined with concerted pressure on the Government from pro-Jewish groups, from the British section of the World Jewish Congress and from the Polish Government in exile. The British Government was pressed for a declaration in response to the news of the persecution that 'would emphasise that those involved in the killing of Jews would be held personally responsible; it would call for an end to mass murder and for the seeking out of refuge for those who could escape'.[22] The campaigner's image of the proposed Declaration made provision for rescue. Reluctant to commit themselves to any such statement on rescue, the British Government only equally reluctantly conceded to the Declaration in recognition of their need to be seen to respond in some way to the persecution reports.

On 17 December 1942 in the name of eleven Allied countries, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, addressed the House of Commons and condemned the Nazis' 'bestial policy of cold blooded extermination'. He went on to describe the reports of mass deportations and to refer to Poland as 'the principal Nazi slaughterhouse'. The United Nations governments were, Eden stated, 'resolved to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with practical measure to this end'.[23] The details of just what those 'practical measures' would constitute were not laid out in the Declaration. The campaigners' vital clause and provision for rescue was absent. The Declaration prompted a spontaneous silence in the House of

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[20] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'
[21] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.169.
[22] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.169.
[23] The United Nations Allied Declaration, Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 385, 17 December 1942.

Commons. Its very existence stood in contrast to the Government's previous silence on the plight of the Jews. The window of time in which the National Committee tried to make rescue a reality appeared to have opened in that December of 1942, so that Tony Kushner comments, 'For the first and only time in the war, the specific fate of the Jews in Nazi Europe was highlighted.'[24] Both the British Government and the National Committee had hoped to see Britain's liberal image upheld in the Declaration. Both had hoped to find a resolution to the rescue question in the words of the Declaration. The aftermath of its announcement revealed how far the nature of those hoped for resolutions differed. An unbreachable cognitive and communicative distance existed between the British Government and the Committee in their interpretation of the Declaration, on rescue, and crucially, in their understanding of the appropriate *British* response to the destruction of European Jewry.

The details of the Declaration prompted an outcry amongst the British public. The future Committee members' reaction revealed their belief in the inadequacies of the Government's stated position. The Committee's emphasis was on the need for action and not for words in the face of the unfolding crisis. Their relationship with the British public was crucial. Recalling the impact in Britain of events such as the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom, the Committee recognised the vital role public opinion played in exerting pressure on the Government. In the absence of any practical measures for rescue in the 1942 Declaration the pro-refugee groups looked to the British public and took steps for action themselves, so that Tony Kushner comments, 'Rathbone was now willing to play the only card left to the pro Jewish campaigners – a popular campaign to embarrass the government and force action.'[25]

Colin Richmond writes of James Parkes that 'what James Parkes did was what he said he was doing; what he said was what he thought; what he thought was what he believed'.[26] In January 1943 Parkes wrote an article that, whilst remaining unpublished, outlined his immediate responses to the Declaration. It illustrates the views he was to develop as a Committee member. The article makes clear his understanding of the responsibility Britain faced in response to the destruction of

[24] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.171.
[25] ibid, p.174.
[26] Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti-Semitism: The Reverend James Parkes 1896 – 1981, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2005), p.2.

European Jewry. Parkes believed that the Declaration could, and would not go far enough to ease Jewish suffering in Europe. At best he saw it only as a starting point, an expression of sentiment that without a corresponding commitment to action remained essentially useless. Central to Parkes' 'The Massacre of the Jews: Future Vengeance or Present Help' was the argument that lay at the heart of the Committee's work. Retribution, as promised in the Declaration, focused on the future and not the present, on the actions of the perpetrators and not on the suffering of the victims. It could not, as James Parkes argued, take the place of rescue as a means to save Jewish lives, 'the Government has promised vengeance after the war, but that will save no lives'.[27] Working within a framework of liberalism that could not account for the Jews as a collective body facing a specific and targeted persecution, the British government was committed to a policy of post war retribution. The notion of 'rescue through victory' applied to *all* of Hitler's victims. It was another major distinction between government and Committee in their interpretation of the role this country should play in response to the destruction process. It is a difference in perspective that reappears during the liberation year of 1945. In the images and reporting of that year the British government found the justification for a policy that had put the war effort first. Members of the Committee and those who shared their views found the consequences that they had always feared of a failure to recognise that the persecution of the Jews needed a specific and active response.

In 1942, 'the British Government hoped that the promise of post war retribution was self contained and could be separated from the problematic issue of rescue'.[28] The Committee, however, consistently maintained the connection between the two issues by comparing their respective consequences in terms of the persecution. The comparison was not a favourable one either for the British government or for the future of rescue. The Committee was further distanced from the government in its belief in the feasibility of rescue itself. The government saw no real possibility of rescue on a large scale. Whilst expressing a considerable degree of sympathy for the Jews' plight, the British government saw no reason to raise 'expectations of action' that might remain unfulfilled.[29] The Committee never suggested that the ultimate

[27] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'
[28] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.175.
[29] ibid, p.175.

cessation of persecution lay anywhere else but with military victory. Yet they believed that it was the very scale of the persecution that made immediate and concerted efforts at rescue in the present absolutely vital. The details of the persecution and the attempts to help the persecuted should not be separated, they argued, from the war effort; 'Be assured that everything helps the war effort which helps to keep constantly before our own minds and those of others the agony which Europe is suffering.'[30] Retribution, however, was only ever going to remain inadequate in terms of British responses. That argument lies at the core of a remarkable essay of 16,000 words written by Victor Gollancz in the immediate aftermath of the Declaration on Christmas Day 1942. In Let My People Go, Gollancz commented of the Declaration that 'it will not save a single Jewish life'.[31] There was a huge public response to the work and it had sold out 'within days'.[32] Gollancz was the vice president of the National Committee and at its establishment 'he anticipated devoting himself to it for many months, "perhaps even years" and refused to take on any new commitments'.[33] Ruth Dudley Edwards comments that the widespread impact of Let My People Go 'took Victor unawares' and he found himself called upon to give papers on the subject of refugees and rescue across the country.[34] The strain of that experience and the extent of Gollancz's deep personal engagement with the details of the destruction process contributed to his weakening health throughout his work with the Committee. For Gollancz, the notions of rescue and retribution were simply incompatible and he explained how retribution shifted the emphasis in Allied thinking away from the suffering of the Jews to the criminality of the Nazis themselves; 'we may sum up the whole matter by saying that there are two ways of reacting to what is happening to the Jews of Europe; the one is mercy – immediate aid to the persecuted; the other is hatred – retribution for the persecutors'.[35] Gollancz had always feared the consequences of a focus on the actions of the perpetrators at the expense of a recognition of the victims' identities. James Parkes shared his concerns. As Colin Richmond explains, in a letter in May 1940 Parkes had expressed his hope that the end of the war would bring a change of emphasis from perpetrator to victim

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[30] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, (National Committee For Rescue from Nazi Terror, London, 1943), p.2.
[31] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1943), p.2.
[32] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.177.
[33] Ruth Dudley Edwards, Victor Gollancz: A Biography, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1987), p.376.
[34] ibid, p.375.
[35] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, p.28.

and a 'shift from the bestialities of Nazi anti-Semitism to the realities of the Jewish problem, in which race plays no part'.[36] Parkes may have felt that British responses to the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945 proved that to have been a futile hope. As *Chapter Three* explains, much of British response in the aftermath of the liberation of camps such as Bergen Belsen remained very much focused on the 'bestiality', not simply of Nazism, but of the German people as a whole. Parkes, an academic, campaigner against antisemitism and a nonconformist Christian and Gollancz, a publisher, founder member of the Left Book Club and a Jew with a complex relationship with Judaism and a deep interest in Christianity drew on similar imagery in their work. In attempting to reconcile his conception of the British character with what he perceived as the inadequate response to the persecution contained in the Declaration, Parkes could only conclude, 'the reason is not a pleasant one for British honour. It is that these people are not regarded as just men or women, not even as children, but as Jews.'[37] Parkes illustrated the role negative British attitudes towards Jews played in the rescue question and in this first attempt to place the destruction process into a British national narrative. Alongside views of Jews that found their roots in the assimilation contract at the heart of British liberal ideology, a fear that a state sponsored rescue plan might be so successful as to bring large numbers of Jews into Britain further limited the official British perspective on rescue. The notion of a rise in domestic antisemitism meant that the debate over rescue was often deflected from the situation in Europe and centred on the position of Jews already present in Britain. Attention was turned inwards and to the domestic situation and away from the persecution at the centre of the rescue issue. The Committee looked outward, all the time motivated by Rathbone's belief in 'the interconnectedness of people throughout the world' and to the consequences of the situation in Europe for its primary victims, the Jews.[38] Parkes suggested that if the British regarded the persecuted as Jews, rather than simply as human beings, then they shared that stance only with the Nazis themselves. Commenting on the government's position, Parkes pointed to the overtly British characteristics that the Committee valued in the British public and that they considered at risk in official responses to rescue. Once again, Britishness or more specifically Englishness was

[36] Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti-Semitism, p.293.
[37] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'
[38] Johanna Alberti, Eleanor Rathbone, p.153.

centralised in any discussion of the destruction of European Jewry. Indeed most of the Committee's publications were based on direct appeals to the British people and in his essay Parkes asked, 'If you can do no more you can write to your MP. If you have a pulpit, speak from it. If you can call a meeting, do so. Wherever you have influence, use it.'[39] Parkes' words illustrated the Committee's faith in the humanity of the British public and their own sense of isolation from the British government; 'it is difficult to see in the attitude of the government, the determination, the humanity, or the generosity which alone would be adequate to so terrible a human catastrophe'. Parkes concludes, 'there is only one answer for men who still believe there is any nobility in the cause for which we are fighting' and, he continues in capital letters, 'WE WILL RECEIVE THEM. AND IF THERE REALLY BE 3 MILLION OF THEM WE WILL THANK GOD THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SAVE SO MANY FROM HITLER'S CLUTCHES. AND IF THERE BE A JEWISH QUESTION TO SOLVE, WE WILL SOLVE IT AS CIVILISED MEN AND NOT AS MURDERERS.'[40] Colin Richmond points out how, 'in the heat of his anger and frustration at the anti-Semitism of the government', Parkes would often begin to underline or capitalise his writing.[41] Parkes' imagery of deliverance is powerful and serves to remind the reader of his belief that not only was action the duty of Britain as a civilised nation, it was that of a Christian nation also. Gollancz takes a similar stance, again placing his faith in the British public; 'Will you wash your hands of responsibility for all this, as Pilate did? Will you pass by on the other side? I cannot believe that you will because that would be contrary to the very essence of the British character.'[42] Gollancz was intensely interested in the image of Jesus and Parkes corresponded with him on spiritual matters relating to Christianity. Echoing Gollancz's question, three months after the publication of Let My People Go, National Committee member Viscount Samuel asked the House of Lords, 'It is a question of people who are fleeing from murder, who are fleeing from men who have swords and torches in their hands and who are killing and burning. When they come to your door, are you to slam the door in their faces?'[43] The scale of the persecution was emphasised by the scale of the moral consequences that inactivity must bring to the British. Parkes and Gollancz's

[39] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'
[40] ibid.
[41] Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti – Semitism, p.301.
[42] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, p.8.
[43] Viscount Samuel, 'German Atrocities; Aid for Refugees', Hansard, House of Lords, Volume 126, 23 March 1943.

essays are not simply expressions of emotion, but rather their frustration and anger are combined with practical suggestions for aid. That measured response to the critics of the refugee or rescue cause was an approach that shaped much of the Committee's work. Focusing on what could still be done and looking to the future, James Parkes used his essay to suggest that Britain should explore further the possibility of the neutral countries taking more refugees. He asked that food and medicine be sent to those refugees who managed to reach Spain or Portugal and commented 'we can set up now a council of the UN to discuss with representative Jewish leaders the future settlement of the Jews'.[44] Both men illustrated a clear understanding of the 'Final Solution', a vision matched by much of the Committee's work. Parkes wrote, 'Hitler was not only threatening but actually carrying out the policy of destroying the whole Jewish population within his powers'[45] and Gollancz commented, 'All this is part, not of a war, but of a quite deliberate policy, openly proclaimed, of exterminating the Jewish population of Europe.'[46] In a document published by the National Committee and entitled Terror in Europe: The Fate of the Jews Alexei Tolstoy and Thomas Mann also argued that the Nazis' treatment of Jews, 'is not a policy of subjugation and oppression, but one of cold and systematic extermination'.[47] Colin Richmond states of Parkes that he was 'thoroughly aware from the start of what was going on'.[48] The same might be said of his fellow Committee member Eleanor Rathbone, who, in a speech in response to the Nazis' ascendancy to total power in 1933, had urged the British Government and people to recognise that an 'evil spirit which bodes very ill for the peace and freedom of the world' had come over Germany.[49]

James Parkes also turned his attention to the way in which the British press were reporting the destruction process; 'we read about it at the time and then forget' seeing 'only little photographs amidst the war news, and their impression passes from our memory'.[50] The responses of The Times and the Jewish Chronicle to the rescue debate serve as a point of comparison with the Committee's viewpoint. On 4

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[44] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'
[45] ibid.
[46] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, p.1.
[47] Alexei Tolstoy and Thomas Mann, Terror in Europe: The Fate of the Jews, (National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, London, 1942), p.9.
[48] Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti Semitism, p.294.
[49] Eleanor Rathbone, Foreign Affairs Debate, 13 April 1933 referred to in Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, p.224.
[50] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'

December 1942, just days before the Declaration, the Jewish Chronicle ran the headline 'Jewish Martyrs of Europe' and noted that 'the Nazis are at present intensifying their campaign against the Jews'.[51] On 11 December the paper carried a black border. The headline read, 'Two Million Jews Slaughtered – Most Terrible Massacre of All Time'.[52] Anticipating the announcement of the Declaration the paper reported that 'ghastly details of mass murder and huge scale slaughter of Jews; men, women and little children have now been confirmed by tested information received by a number of Allied Governments'. Using the word 'holocaust', the Jewish Chronicle editorial addressed the Christian British public; 'If only a few were thus plucked from the holocaust, the Christian conscience could at any rate proclaim that it had tried, and done its best.'[53] Finally, predicting the questions of Parkes and Gollancz, the paper asked, 'Can nothing, again absolutely nothing, be done to succour the victims?'[54] On 17 December The Times ran the headline, 'Barbarity to Jews – Retribution by Allies – Commons Endorse a Pledge'. The Times reporter concluded of the silence in the House of Commons that, 'it was a truly impressive scene. Its silence was more eloquent than words of deep sympathy for the helpless victims of terrorism and emphasised the Government's resolve that the fight against the barbarous regime overshadowing Europe shall be waged to the victorious end'.[55] The rescue through victory policy and the centrality of Britain's sense of moral standing in relation to the regime in Europe was reaffirmed, as in the editorial of the following day; 'A memorable scene in parliament yesterday testified to the power of the deepest conviction of the House – the conviction which steels the national resolve to endure all things that may be required in order to purge the earth of the Nazi abomination.'[56] The Declaration appeared to prompt the paper to comment that it was the British people, and not the oppressed in Europe who must 'endure all things' in the face of Nazism. The rescue issue, like liberation would later, offered the opportunity to demonise the enemy and to justify the war effort. That was a war effort that the British authorities deemed wholly incompatible with any plan for rescue, least of all, for the rescue of European Jews.

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[51] Jewish Chronicle, 4 December 1942, p.1.
[52] ibid, 11 December 1942.
[53] ibid, 11 December 1942.
[54] ibid, 11 December 1942.
[55] The Times, 17 December 1942.
[56] ibid, 18 December 1942.

In a letter to The Times Neill Malcolm former League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expressed his sense of disappointment in the Declaration. He joined Parkes and Gollancz in drawing unfavourable comparisons between the Declaration's sentiments and those of Hitler's speeches; 'compared with these truly awful threats, the Declarations by the powers sound pitifully tame. Unlike Hitler we cannot convert words into deeds and must be content with promises which will not save one single life.'[57] Malcolm was equally concerned by the Government's emphasis on future retribution. He did also recognise the need to extend any such later retribution beyond the Nazi leadership to include all those involved in the destruction process: 'A promise that at some future date both ring leaders and actual perpetrators of the outrages will be bought to book is but cold comfort for, as I have said, it saves no lives.'[58] The need to convert words into deeds had always been at the centre of the Committee's beliefs. By April 1943 it was a position that they shared with the British government. Yet, as rescue entered the international arena, their differing interpretations of the need for action and the potential contribution of the British revealed the limitations of the apparently common ground between them.

The British government's fears that the Declaration would prompt calls for action that, if ignored, threatened Britain's image in terms of the rescue question appeared to be justified in the early months of 1943. The need to be seen to act was evident. The British were unprepared to act alone and were still convinced both that little could be done and that essentially they had *already* done all that they could. The British contacted the American government, 'setting out British views on the refugee problem and inviting the United States to consider the expediency of a private and informal United Nations conference to discuss possible solutions'.[59] At the same time a group of 'sympathetic MPs and Jewish representatives' met at Burlington House in London to press the Government for further action.[60] The official consolidation of this group in March 1943 led to the creation of the National Committee. Its membership, according to one of its leading lights, Eleanor Rathbone, 'may fairly claim to represent the greatest common measure of opinion among those outside government

[57] Neill Malcolm, 'Aid for the Jews', Letter to The Times, 22 December 1942.
[58] ibid.
[59] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.184.
[60] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.178.

circles who are chiefly concerned with a solution'.[61] The proposed conference with the United States offered the Committee a degree of hope. That hope was necessary as the public outcry that had accompanied the Declaration and on which they relied, had begun to diminish. However, the conference, held during April 1943 in Bermuda, revealed the extent to which the window for rescue was beginning to close by the summer of 1943.

The Americans delayed their response to the suggestion of a conference leaving the British Government struggling to maintain the image that they were actively responding to the crisis as demanded by the British people in the wake of the Declaration. When they did reply, the Americans published the details of the possibility of a conference. That publication ensured that the initiative for a conference dealing with the refugee crisis appeared to be theirs rather than Britain's. The question of rescue, as liberation would later be, was now a key battleground in the contest for image developing between Britain and America during the war years. In the weeks before the proposed conference tensions between the two nations were high. At moments the relationship was at risk of descending into a petulant process of point scoring, as US Secretary of State Sumner Welles' words suggest, when he remarked prior to the conference that 'he had been regretfully forced to the conclusion for some time past by many incidents that the British Government was permitting the impression to be created that it was the great outstanding champion of the Jewish people...and that it was being held back...by the unwillingness of this Government to take any action...'.[62] The refugee crisis appeared to be commanding the attention of both countries. That attention was not focused on the individual refugees, their lives or on the destruction process from which they were fleeing, but rather on the behaviour of the British and American Governments. Again discussion of rescue turned inwards and away from the source of need. In March 1943 Viscount Samuel had attempted to remind the House of Lords of the consequences of protracted state discussion and negotiations for the people of Europe; 'While Governments prepare memoranda and exchange notes and hold conferences, week after week and month after month, the Nazis go on killing men, women and children.' In the same debate, another Committee member, Lord Rochester for the Methodist and Free Churches,

[61] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.6.
[62] See Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.188.

simply stated 'delay in rescue means death'.[63] Later that year the Committee's news bulletin on the refugee crisis would simply note, 'it is seldom realised either here or in America, that in the last few years the greatest migration of peoples in the history of the world has taken place'.[64] The absence of what they called 'a desperate anxiety to get the job done' amongst the British Government was an enduring source of frustration for the Committee.[65] In the first months of 1943, however, the British and American governments were keen to ensure that mutual topics of national sensitivity would not be discussed at Bermuda. Palestine and the American immigration quota system were off the agenda. Their absence had obvious implications for the rescue question. The limitations of the Bermuda conference were set before the delegates arrived. In a memorandum described by Wasserstein as 'one of the fullest and most considered British statements of policy on the refugee problem', it was made clear that Jewish suffering should not in any way be regarded as greater than or distinct from the 'the acute suffering among non-Jews in Allied countries' at the risk of generating 'Allied criticism'.[66] The first point of the British document informed the Americans that, 'the refugee problem cannot be treated as though it were wholly a Jewish problem' and asked that no one must 'raise false hopes among refugees by suggesting or announcing alternative possible destinations'.[67] The British Government's sensitivity to the 'announcement' of details regarding the refugee crisis was therefore evident from January 1943 when the initial contact with the American Government regarding a conference was made; it may explain to some degree the acute reaction to the Americans' later *public* action regarding the conference details. The singular concrete product of the eventual conference was the re-establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, first established at the Evian conference of 1938. Evian had been intended as a means to find an 'international solution' to the refugee crisis. In reality, as Bernard Wasserstein notes, the conference amounted to 'a dismal series of speeches by the delegate of country after country, each of whom demonstrated the inability of his nation, notwithstanding the deepest sympathy and generosity towards refugees, to absorb further significant numbers of

[63] Viscount Samuel and Lord Rochester, 'German Atrocities; Aid for Refugees', Hansard, House of Lords, Volume 126, 23 March 1943.
[64] News from Hitler's Europe, 23 November 1943.
[65] National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, Continuing Terror, (National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, London, 1944), p.4.
[66] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.184.
[67] ibid, p.184.

immigrants'.[68] The distinction between an immigrant and a refugee remained essentially blurred in the minds of many in a British Government that reacted to the crisis from within the boundaries of an existing immigration – not refugee - policy. The ghost of Evian was very much present in Bermuda. The British hoped that the re-establishment of the International Committee would quieten the waiting refugee groups – it was not going to be enough.

The conference was an intense disappointment to the National Committee for Rescue. Rathbone said of Bermuda, 'the defeatist tones of the opening speeches, intended no doubt to check undue hopes, caused widespread dismay in both countries among those who felt deeply on the question and desire bold and speedy action'.[69] She concluded that, 'we have not been encouraged to hope for any but small things'.[70] The Committee had been hopeful about Bermuda not only because it drew together the countries with the power to act on the refugee question, but also because the British Government had conceded to a parliamentary debate on the issue in the aftermath of the conference. The debate had been long awaited by the Committee. At the end of a Committee document, Evidence of Public Concern (intended once again to prove to the British Government the extent of the nation's concern regarding the refugees and dated February- April 1943), the Committee's secretary briefly noted, 'it was announced in Parliament today that the promised debate on our question will be after the Bermuda Conference and will probably take place on Tuesday May 4'.[71] The debate actually took place on 19 May 1943 and revealed the true nature of the strained relations between the Committee and the British government. Wasserstein illustrates the extent to which it had become clear that the British government had regained its balance on the rescue and refugee question by the time of the debate; 'concerned lest the critics of the government monopolise the debate, the Cabinet decided on 10th May that in view of the disproportionate number of speeches made by Members holding extreme views in favour of free admission of refugees to this country, the whips were invited to arrange that some members would intervene in the debate who would put a

[68] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.9.
[69] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.15.
[70] ibid, p.16.
[71] National Committee for Rescue, Evidence of Public Concern, (National Committee for Rescue, London, February 1943).

more balanced view'.[72] However, the Government were unable to deter Eleanor Rathbone who gave what Johanna Alberti has described as 'one of the most impassioned speeches of her time as an MP' during the refugee debate.[73] Drawing on the biographical tribute that Mary Stocks wrote to her friend Rathbone in 1949, Susan Pederson recently reminded listeners to Radio Four's Woman's Hour that Rathbone was not only independently minded and considered to be 'formidable' by many of her colleagues. She had also been elected to parliament as an independent MP. She was therefore largely immune to the actions of the government and party Whips.[74] Later, fellow pro-refugee campaigner Norman Bentwich, describing Eleanor Rathbone as one 'of a few devoted English friends' would recall that she was 'relentless in pursuing and prodding ministers and under secretaries if there was any confusion of the refugees with 'enemy aliens' in the real sense'.[75] Throughout her career Rathbone 'haunted Government departments'.[76] Pederson recounts how other MPs would attempt to hide if they saw her in the House of Commons' corridors. The anecdote perhaps stems from a tribute to Rathbone written by fellow MP Harold Nicolson in 1946 in which he recalled having 'observed Ministers or Under Secretaries wince in terror when they observed that familiar figure advancing towards them along the corridors'.[77] Colin Richmond simply describes Rathbone as 'a far more redoubtable campaigner' than her fellow Committee member James Parkes.[78]

From the beginning of the parliamentary debate the Government established that 'the refugee problem should not be considered as being confined to persons of any particular race or faith'.[79] Furthermore, action for rescue in the present would not be an option. Home Office Under Secretary Osbert Peake made clear that; 'we must recognise that these people are for the present mostly beyond the possibility of rescue – they are hemmed in – the rate of extermination is such that no measure of relief, on

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[72] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.203.
[73] Johanna Alberti, Eleanor Rathbone, p.135.
[74] Susan Pederson, Woman's Hour, (Interview, BBC Radio Four, 10 March 2004). See also, Susan Pederson, Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience, (Yale University Press, London, 2004). Mary Stocks' remarks about Rathbone's status as an independent MP are made in her work, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, p.143.
[75] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, (Cresset Press, London, 1956), p.122.
[76] Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, p.287.
[77] Harold Nicolson in The Spectator, 11 January 1946. Reproduced in Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, p.142.
[78] Colin Richmond, Campaigner against Anti-Semitism, p.181.
[79] Osbert Peake, Under Secretary to the Home Office, 'Refugee Problem', Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 389, 19 May 1943.

however large a scale could be commensurate with the problem'.[80] Peake had been part of the British delegation to the Bermuda conference. He was also familiar with Rathbone's relentless style and, as Eleanor's biographer later noted, Peake personally 'bore the brunt of her agitation' throughout his time with the Home Office. After Rathbone's death, Peake paid tribute to a parliamentary opponent who had been 'the bane of his official life as Under Secretary at the Home Office for nearly five years'.[81] The tone of the Government response throughout the refugee debate was firmly balanced between a desire to counter suggestions that the British Government had been anything other than 'in earnest on this matter' and a desire to use the debate to effectively put a halt to the rescue question once and for all. Crucial to achieving that aim, it seems, was not only a need to reiterate past Government efforts or initiatives, but also to undermine both the arguments and importantly, the character of those calling for rescue. The tone of the debate was noticeably personal and that a degree of bitterness existed between both sides on the rescue question by 1943 was clearly evident. For example, Rathbone had remarked of the Home Secretary, 'Why does he always make us feel in his parliamentary answers, and even in our approaches to him privately, as if the whole question of refugees was becoming a bore and an irritation to him and that he was transferring to refugees the dislike which he quite openly feels for ourselves?'[82] During the debate Peake referred to some 'fantastic suggestions' regarding rescue plans emanating from 'certain quarters' and not from 'the minds of reasonable people'.[83] Throughout proceedings Peake was both subtly and directly critical of the work of pro-refugee activists like the Committee's members, most particularly of Eleanor Rathbone herself. Peake also referred to Victor Gollancz's Let My People Go and used Gollancz's own words to counter the very possibility of rescue; 'We must, I think, recognise that the United Nations can do little or nothing in the immediate present for the vast numbers now under Hitler's control. He is determined not to **let those people go**.'(my emphasis)[84] The Committee members had never suggested that any rescue measure could match the scale of the persecution. They instead believed in the need to make an effort, however minimal in its effect. Despite acknowledging the impact that the notion of rescue, or what he described as

[80] Peake, 'Refugee Problem.'
[81] Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, p.288.
[82] Eleanor Rathbone, 'Refugee Problem.'
[83] Peake, 'Refugee Problem.'
[84] ibid.

'this problem' had made on the British people until that point, Peake continued, 'much has been written and spoken about it, not always with great discretion'.[85] His suggestion that the Committee members were indiscreet not only served as an opportunity to cast doubt on their characters (and arguably, on their ability to exercise a discretion considered an important part of the English character – not least in wartime England), but in the context of the debate allowed Peake to avoid any further detailed discussion of Government plans or proposed measures on the refugee crisis. Instead he argued that those measures could only be discussed in Secret Session and not in open debate. Peake's reference to the need for a Secret Session and his following comment, 'I only hope that nothing I have said will have any unfortunate effects' served to create the impression that the refugee crisis, the discussion of rescue and even the behaviour of the pro-refugee campaigners themselves posed a potential threat to the country's security; worse still, to the war effort deemed central to the protection of that security.[86] The Government's reluctance to discuss the question of refugees and rescue in public debate had already been evident in their concern over the published details of the Bermuda Conference. Perhaps the Government had also recognised by now the extent to which the Committee relied on the general British public having access to, and engaging with, information regarding the destruction process. A failure to make those facts available combined with a suggestion that to do so was a risk to national security in wartime would surely limit public demand and therefore leave the Committee without its most powerful source of support. Rathbone's words displayed her frustration and distress. She described Peake's speech as 'a plea for gratitude for what the Government have done in the past and for what they vaguely foreshadow may be done under the decisions of the Bermuda Conference. That is to ask for gratitude for small mercies'.[87] In recognising the Government's attempt to restrict the terms and information of the debate by arguing for the necessity of secrecy and facing the inherent limitations of parliamentary etiquette that meant she could only speak in *reply* to Peake, she stated: 'We feel like the schoolboy who was asked to write an essay on snakes in Ireland, and who could only say that there were no snakes in Ireland.'[88] Later that year Rathbone once again vented her frustration at the continued suggestion that in asking questions regarding

[85] Peake, 'Refugee Problem.'
[86] ibid.
[87] Eleanor Rathbone, 'Refugee Problem.'
[88] ibid.

refugees and rescue she was risking national security; 'if we say publicly all we know and clamour for all we want, we are told that we are informing the enemy and hampering efforts that might otherwise be planned. So we have kept silent for months and damped down public agitation. Then nothing happens or very little that is apparent happens. It really seems as though the authorities go to sleep'.[89] During the debate in May 1943 Peake made a direct attack on Rathbone's Rescue the Perishing that was published at the same time and contained the Committee's point-by-point rescue plan. Rathbone was critical of the British immigration policy in the document. In response, Peake had commented, 'A visa is not a ticket, nor is it a condition precedent in every case to entry in this country.'[90] He went on to suggest that the 'facts' are 'never known in full to the person who puts forward a case such as this'.[91] The remarks were patronising and personal. Rathbone's responses to such comments were also personal; not in defence of her own feelings, but instead designed to form direct connections between her critics' consciences and the plight of the victims; 'we ask whether ministers who show impatience with their critics and who assure us that everything possible is being done, would feel quite so certain about that if their own wives, children or parents were among these people'.[92] During the debate, Rathbone's work was dismissed as propaganda, a word, of course, with significant resonance in wartime British society. Its use in this context was perhaps guaranteed to ensure that a shadow of doubt would always be present in any future discussion of rescue; 'There has been a regular spate of propaganda issued by people who feel very deeply upon this matter, people whose minds are haunted and tormented by visions of what is going on in Germany and Poland. Some of this propaganda is unfair.'[93] Peake's words seemed to suggest that much of what the Committee members believed might have been a product of their imaginations or that their emotional commitment to the subject had reduced their ability to be rational. That, of course, allowed the Government position to appear clear, practical and unemotional in contrast. The British Government's commitment to the 'rescue through victory' policy was firmly maintained throughout the debate and it was made clear that any plan for rescue in the present was considered to be a threat to the war effort; 'every week and every month

[89] Eleanor Rathbone, 'War Situation and Foreign Affairs', Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 395, 14 December 1943.
[90] Peake, 'Refugee Problem.'
[91] ibid.
[92] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.17.
[93] Peake, 'Refugee Problem.'

by which victory is brought nearer will contribute more to their salvation than any diversion of our war effort in measures of relief, even if such measures could be put into effect'.[94] The careful choice and balance of Peake's words illustrated further the extent to which the British Government had rediscovered its confidence on the rescue and refugee issue in the weeks after Bermuda. Now an Allied victory was cast as the provider of 'salvation' – something wide ranging, total, complete, whilst the call for rescue was presented as a 'diversion' or a 'measure of relief' – something temporary, limited, fleeting and more importantly as a risk, not only for the refugee, but for the British people.

The Committee's disappointment with Bermuda and the debate was matched in the Jewish Chronicle. On 23 April 1943 the paper commented, 'Even the most irrepressible optimist can scarcely fail to experience a rapid chilling of their hopes for the future of refugees of all kinds as they read the reports of the Bermuda conference.'[95] As elements of the conference were revealed the Jewish Chronicle became more despondent; 'over against the monstrous magnitude of the emergency, the delegates proposals seem depressingly small. In the presence of so colossal a catastrophe mere denunciations and lamentations are worse than nothing'.[96] On 28 May 1943 the newspaper's editorial addressed the content of the speeches given during the parliamentary debate; 'They amount, if not to the passing of a death sentence on the millions of Jews still surviving in Europe, at least to a pitiful confession of impotence to stay or overt the executions.'[97] The paper's conclusions on the debate mirrored the same levels of exhaustion and frustration as Eleanor Rathbone experienced; 'The Jew has wandered enough. He is weary of begging help. He is tired of Evians and Bermudas.'[98] The Times was more reserved in its comment on the parliamentary debate. The paper followed an argument consistent with that of the British government. Any attempt at rescue, it was suggested, may serve to worsen the situation for the victims, rather than improve it; 'The debate in the House of Commons today on possible measures to help the people in the occupied countries of Europe who are suffering from the enemy's policy of deportation or extermination

[94] Peake, 'Refugee Problem.'
[95] Jewish Chronicle, 23 April 1943.
[96] ibid, 23 April 1943.
[97] ibid, 7 May 1943.
[98] ibid, 28 May 1943.

was handicapped by the necessity of restraint in the interest of the sufferers.'[99] The paper made no direct mention of Jews. The British adherence to a 'rescue through victory' policy was emphasised with reference to Peake's words; 'He (Peake) insisted that the one solution of a painful problem was an allied victory and that any measures designed to help the victims which impeded the war effort would only bring increased suffering.'[100]

The Committee's response to Bermuda and the consolidation of their rescue plan based on their central arguments was contained in Eleanor Rathbone's pamphlet, Rescue the Perishing, published in April 1943. Rescue the Perishing was a reflection of the wider British reaction to the concept of rescue and the plight of European Jewry. Rathbone noted the objective of the Committee as, 'to act as a medium for cooperation between the various organisations, groups and individuals concerned with the rescue of victims of Nazi persecution'.[101] Her opening 'appeal to readers' was revealing in its categorical statement that the details included in the document 'are not atrocity stories exaggerated for propaganda'.[102] The parliamentary debate proved that such assurances had not convinced the British government. Rathbone's recognition that doubts remained in British society regarding the veracity of the Committee's claims was evident in her attempt to include reliable witnesses in her work. 'American workers' and a 'police officer' are cited as just such trustworthy witnesses as though Rathbone needed to validate her evidence. She recognised the centrality of an allied war victory; 'nothing will end these horrors except a victory which will end the power of those who have caused them'.[103] Both Rathbone and the Committee were distinguished by their belief that rescue need not impede the war effort and might successfully be made part of it. As Tony Kushner comments, 'To Rathbone, the battle to win the war and to save the Jews were inseparable.'[104] In a 1944 publication, Continuing Terror, the Committee suggested that rescue should indeed become part of the war effort; 'instructions should be given to all Allied commanders wherever operating, to do everything possible, without hindering military operations, to rescue

[99] The Times, 20 May 1943.
[100] ibid, 20 May 1943.
[101] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.6.
[102] ibid, p.1.
[103] ibid, p.1.
[104] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.174.

Jews and political prisoners'.[105] The publication of Continuing Terror marked a renewal of the Committee's energies after the disappointments of Bermuda and the debate. Its regular newsletter informed readers that the pamphlet's publication meant that 'the National Committee has decided once again to enlist the active support of public opinion for their humanitarian policy by launching a country wide campaign'.[106] In Continuing Terror the Committee bemoaned the lack of inspired leadership on the question of refugees and rescue amongst the British Government; 'The thought which continues to haunt us is that if there could have been found anywhere a front rank statesman able to devote himself to this question...it might have been and might still be possible to rescue many thousands from death and from mental and physical torture worse than death.'[107] The Committee's consistent argument that the numbers involved in rescue were only ever going to be relatively small illustrated their understanding of the realities of the situation in Europe. It also hints at their awareness of the government's sustained fear that a rescue plan might prompt a flood of Jews to British shores. Bernard Wasserstein comments, 'far more than Washington, London decision makers felt threatened by the Nazis ability to "dump" thousands, perhaps millions of Jews'.[108] The idea of a 'flood' of foreign Jews and the associated import of antisemitism into British society echoed British responses during the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews at the turn of the twentieth century: indeed, the 'flood' imagery is still a familiar part of discourse on immigration, asylum and refugees in Britain today. James Parkes saw this argument in action and recognised the way in which it limited any provision for rescue. He found it incomprehensible; 'It is even said – as though the idea should terrify instead of rejoicing us – that Hitler might take our word, and send us all the Jews still alive in Europe, several million of them.'[109]

In Rescue the Perishing Rathbone again addressed the British public directly; 'You are asked not only to feel, but to act.' Rathbone urged the reader to 'show the government that public opinion will support them in taking every step possible to

[105] Continuing Terror, Preface.
[106] News From Hitler's Europe, 22 February 1944.
[107] Continuing Terror, p.18.
[108] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.113.
[109] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews.'

rescue as many of the sufferers as possible before it too late'.[110] Throughout their campaign the Committee members felt that the British people had the power to reassure and bolster the government and to help them to overcome their apparent lack of moral courage in the face of the destruction process. Rathbone described the public's outraged response to the Allied Declaration as illustrative of their 'practical and inherited sense of responsibility for all remediable human suffering'.[111] The last point of the Committee's Twelve Point Plan for Rescue illustrated their belief that Britain should be seen to set an example on rescue; 'the adoption of the principle that, whatever other nations may do or leave undone, the British contribution to the work of rescue should be the speediest and most generous possible'.[112] It was a point Rathbone made often. As in Parliament during a debate on refugees on 11 February 1943 when she asked the Home Secretary, 'Should we not set an example ourselves before we can expect other countries to do so?' She had attempted to ask the Home Secretary whether he was aware of the 'great anxiety' surrounding the situation of refugees. His reply that 'this is a UN problem' met with a clear cut response from Rathbone that might be said to sum up her understanding of the relationship between Britain and Hitler's victims; 'My question applies to this country.'[113] Again on the 25 February 1943 she asked the House, 'Is not the extreme rigidity of the present restrictions a bad example to other countries?'[114] Rathbone's understanding of British national identity demanded that Britain and British people should take the initiative in response to the crisis. In her written work, Rathbone cited forces of public opinion including the press and the churches. The Archbishops of Canterbury, York and Chichester represented the Church of England on the Committee itself. Rathbone included details of those amongst the general public who had offered 'practical help' such as the 'loan of houses, money for maintenance, secretarial or organising assistance'.[115] The offers seem numerous. Yet they are tinged with a temporality and the suggestion that they might have been motivated by an impulse of emotion that might not be enough evidence of the fundamental change in British attitudes for

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[110] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.2.
[111] ibid, p.8.
[112] ibid, p.8.
[113] Eleanor Rathbone, Parliamentary Question, 'Jews and Other Refugees' (Admission to the United Kingdom), Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 386, 11 February 1943.
[114] Eleanor Rathbone, Parliamentary Question, 'Jews' (Enemy Occupied Europe), Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 387, 25 February 1943.
[115] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.19.

which Rathbone hoped. 'Replies to Objections' were included in the Committee's program for rescue. Those replies were evidence in themselves of some of the main arguments to be heard in Britain against the idea of a rescue plan. Rathbone attempted to answer such statements as; 'we cannot spare the food' and 'if we let more Jews in it might promote anti Semitic feeling' to which she responded, 'Anti-Semitism is an ugly infection from Hitlerism. It is an insult to the British people to suppose that even those who "don't like Jews" would rather leave them to be massacred than find asylum for a few more thousands of them.'[116] Some of the points made echoed British objections to Jewish (and other) immigration earlier in the twentieth century. Rathbone's responses made evident once more the distinctions between the attitudes of the Committee and of the British government; 'Ships, it seems, can usually be found for any purpose for which the government sufficiently wants to find them.'[117] Transportation, particularly shipping, difficulties were one of the primary arguments used by the British Government against any affirmative action on rescue throughout the refugee crisis. Rathbone illustrated the way in which the Committee combined vision with realism in terms of rescue. They did not look to the past and lost opportunities but instead to the possibilities for action in the present and in the future; 'For those in Poland, action by ourselves except through victory seems impossible. But we still have to think of the thousands in daily danger of deportation to Poland from the occupied lands; to fill up the empty ghettoes till their turn comes for the slaughterhouses.'[118] Rathbone revealed the extent of her personal involvement in the rescue cause and just how far she was hurt by suggestions that in supporting such a cause she was betraying her country. She could not see why rescue and British or English identity should be incompatible; 'I have been accused of belittling the record of my own country and no Englishwoman likes to do that, even justly.'[119]

That same level of personal involvement and commitment was evident in the Committee's regular bulletin, News From Hitler's Europe. Eva Hubback, Committee press secretary, fellow feminist and close personal friend of Eleanor Rathbone described News as 'a small and unpretentious bulletin'.[120] It was in fact an incredibly

[116] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.9.
[117] ibid, p.9.
[118] ibid, p.5.
[119] ibid, p.10.
[120] News From Hitler's Europe, 5 September 1944.

detailed Europe wide newsletter containing reports that mainly dealt with the treatment of Jews. The level of information and focus was not matched in the British national press at the time. The bulletin contained information concerning extermination sites such as Treblinka, described Theresienstadt as a 'ghetto town' and used and understood the Nazis' own euphemisms for the destruction process, as for example with reference to the Jews of Czechoslovakia in 1944; 'The liquidation of Czech Jewry – The latest news from the Czech Protectorate suggests that the Nazis are now going to liquidate the remainder of the Czech Jewish community.'[121] The bulletin's information regarding Auschwitz Birkenau and its role in the destruction process was detailed and displayed, for the time, a relatively high level of accuracy; 'Between 1,500,000 and 1,750,000 Jews of all nationalities have been gassed or otherwise killed in the two Silesian concentration camps of Oswiecim and Birkenau. Those who are not immediately transferred to the gas chambers are made to do work under intolerable conditions for various German industrial concerns.'[122] The sources for the information were wide ranging, including underground representatives, foreign, even German, newspapers and reports from Auschwitz escapees. Themes evident in the Committee's other publications were developed and reactions to significant events in the rescue debate were recorded. In October 1943, News carried reports of Denmark's successful attempt to rescue its Jewish community and asked, 'What have we done with our infinitely greater resources and power that we can compare with their action?'[123] Sweden's declaration that it would provide shelter for Danish Jews meant, according to the writers of News that she had 'showed herself a civilised Christian country'. The publication illustrated the Committee's firm understanding of the place of the Scandinavian countries in the Nazis' racial ideology. More significantly, it was in their reporting of other nations' actions that their real shame regarding the efforts of their own government was most obvious; 'How does our record stand when matched with theirs?'[124] Marking the first anniversary of the Allied Declaration, in an article for News, Chairman of the Executive Committee and MP, D.R.Grenfell noted that 'during those twelve months more Jews have been wantonly slaughtered: and the terror against other racial and political minorities has been continued. Despite the pressure of opinion in the House and outside the

[121] News from Hitler's Europe, 24 January 1944.
[122] ibid, 18 July 1944.
[123] ibid, 22 October 1943.
[124] ibid, 22 October 1943.

Government has done little to help the victims of this brutal policy'.[125] News was striking because it made clear the depth of the Committee's understanding regarding the situation in Europe. The bulletin essentially becomes a document through which the development of the Holocaust might be traced. Conditions for Jews in Vichy France, Poland and in Italy were recorded in detail. Often the bulletin made a prediction regarding the Nazis' next course of action and reported in the next issue that the predicted events had taken place. The Committee's foresight was particularly evident in the case of the Jews of the Balkans, perhaps one of the most important cases in the historiography of the Allies and the rescue of European Jewry. In December 1943 the bulletin commented on the increasing tension as the situation in Yugoslavia worsened. By 28 March 1944 News commented, 'over a million people are threatened with torture as a result of Hitler's invasion of Hungary'.[126] On 4 April 1944 the bulletin carried the response of the British Foreign Secretary to a question from pro-refugee MP Sidney Silverman regarding the future of Hungarian Jewry. The response illustrated the government's regained consistency on its stance towards rescue by 1944; 'On this in common with their allies, now that the hour of Germany's defeat grows ever nearer and more certain, HMG can only repeat their detestation of Germany's crimes and their determination that all those guilty of them shall be brought to justice.'[127] On 2 May 1944 a News report was headlined 'Terror over Hungary' and told of the implementation of Nuremberg style measures in the country. In commenting on the Hungarian authorities' attempts to implement those laws, the Committee again illustrated their full understanding of the intricacies and senselessness of Nazi racial policy; 'The fact has often been commented on that the Nazis, in spite of their 'racial' theory, have had to use the religion of a person's parents or grandparents as the only indication of his or her "race."'[128] On 4 July 1944, the bulletin commented: 'The mass extermination of Hungarian Jewry has started.' The 'gas chambers of Oswiecim' were cited as the Jews' final destination.[129] In his Christmas message for News in December 1944 James Parkes noted that 'the inter governmental committee on refugees estimates that only 1600 Jews are still alive in

[125] News from Hitler's Europe, 21 December 1943.
[126] ibid, 28 March 1944.
[127] ibid, 4 April 1944.
[128] ibid, 16 May 1944.
[129] ibid, 4 July 1944.

Yugoslavia'.[130] News illustrated the powerful combination of the Committee's arguments for rescue and the facts of the destruction process. It also showed the way in which the Committee understood the treatment of the Jews and the necessity of urgency in the face of it. The writing was controlled, yet the emotional commitment of the writers was clear.

On 30 January 1945 News commented 'It is not necessary to draw up a formal balance sheet of the Third Reich: its evil consequences in every field of human activity, are almost beyond debate.'[131] However the Committee's account of the liberation year does in many ways represent their continued attempt to provide the British people with the minute details of the consequences of the Nazis' actions. 'Eye Witness' reports from 'Oswiecim' included in their bulletin provided details of the conditions in the extermination camp in its final days and of the Red Army's arrival; 'the world will probably hear in a day or two whether any inmates of these camps have been liberated, or whether they have all been killed in the gas chambers and shooting yards'. [132] By the end of February 1945, the writers of News 'are happy to record the fact that several thousand inmates have survived the extermination camp of Oswiecim, contrary to the original plans of the Nazis'. [133] On 6 March 1945 the Committee were able to cross through the word Hitler in the title of their news bulletin. They marked the moment with an article entitled 'Hitler', again with the word symbolically crossed out. Throughout 1945 News recorded how the reports from the liberated western concentration camps, including Bergen Belsen, 'confirm the evidence which was available, long ago, in the numerous accounts of escapees from Nazi terror'.[134] Huge numbers – estimates of those murdered and of those still in captivity – dominated the bulletin throughout 1945 and again illustrated the Committee's grasp of the scale of the destruction process.[135] The extent of that understanding was clearly evident in their notes regarding the camp at the centre of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. The Committee had a sense of the place of

[130] News from Hitler's Europe, 19 December 1944.
[131] ibid, 30 January 1945.
[132] ibid, 30 January 1945.
[133] ibid, 13 February 1945.
[134] ibid, 24 April 1945.
[135] For example, see the edition of News from Europe for 24 April 1945 that included a list of more than ten European countries and the Committee's estimates of the numbers of Jews left alive in those countries. In the same edition they estimated that more than 4 million Jews had been murdered.

Bergen Belsen in the wider workings of the destruction process that was absent from the majority of British state and popular responses to the camp's liberation in April 1945. On 24 April 1945, News writers noted; 'it was only after the recent transfer to Belsen of the former second in command of Oswiecim extermination camp that it became the hell which is described in the latest dispatches'.[136] Josef Kramer, the 'Beast of Belsen', became the symbol of Nazi evil for the British public in 1945. He remained an enduring part of Britain's memory and representation of the camp.

In March 1945 the Committee held a meeting at which 'it was agreed unanimously that the need for our work will continue at least until the end of the war in Europe and probably for sometime afterwards'.[137] Despite their continued commitment and their belief in the possibility of action and rescue even 'at this 11th hour', by 1945 the Committee's hopes for a concerted effort for rescue by the British Government had almost completely faded.[138] The Nazis' destruction process had continued unabated and without any corresponding action to rescue its victims. The Committee had faced a British government that showed little inclination to change its policy and that, after a significant but ultimately fleeting moment of insecurity, had regained its control over the subject of rescue and refugees by the end of 1943. The vital public opinion that had provided the Committee with its support and with their last vestige of hope had largely diminished. The war had dragged on and the details of the Allied Declaration that had provided the impetus for the rescue campaign were forgotten. The Committee's strength had been further weakened by the loss of Victor Gollancz who suffered a nervous breakdown. In her biography of Gollancz, Ruth Dudley Edwards notes that 'the appalling evidence that came before the Committee..had a devastating effect'.[139] The effect of their work was no less damaging for James Parkes and Eleanor Rathbone. Parkes' recognition of the true nature of Nazi actions towards Jews had 'filled him with an inexpressible anguish' that would mean in years to come he 'could hardly bear to remember the Holocaust'.[140] 1945 and the end of the war did not represent an end to Rathbone's vast workload. She continued to highlight the suffering that continued in Europe despite the cessation of hostilities. She died

[136] News from Europe, 24 April 1945.
[137] ibid, 6 March 1945.
[138] ibid, 6 March 1945.
[139] Ruth Dudley Edwards, Victor Gollancz: A Biography, p.377.
[140] Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti-Semitism, p.145 and Tony Kushner, 'Foreword' in Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti – Semitism, p.xviii.

suddenly on 1 January 1946 having spent the morning speaking to Gollancz about publications for the 'Save Europe Now' campaign.[141] Yet, the significance of the Committee's enduring commitment cannot be downplayed in an account of Britain's attempt to create a place for the Holocaust in its national narrative. Perhaps Mary Stocks' description of the Committee as an 'instrument for agitation and publicity' does not go far enough.[142] At a vital stage in British reactions to the destruction process, the Committee succeeded in placing the plight of the victims on the official and public agenda. It was an attempt to bring both the rescue of those victims to the fore and to protect the honour of the British nation in which the Committee members believed. Their search for 'cognitive control' over the facts of the unfolding destruction process had left them reliant on their understanding of British identity. Their actions and importantly, their relationship with the British government and with the British people proved that Britain's attempt to draw on a narrative of Britishness in response to the Holocaust had begun before the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps. That more Jewish victims of the Holocaust were not rescued as a result of the Committee's work and that doubts remain today over Britain's actions during the Holocaust years, is perhaps not the most important point on which to conclude a summary of their work. Instead in 1943 Victor Gollancz asked the British people; 'For a few brief moments, be just one of those human beings, whose body, with its nerves that can suffer so, and whose mind and soul, with all their resources of terror and despair, are concealed by the cold abstraction of 'one hundred and fifty' and 'ten thousand' and 'six million.'[143] For more than 'a few brief moments' THIS would be the National Committee's greatest achievement. In May 1945, still looking to the future, its supporters turned their attention to 'the need to cater for the liberated' and, alongside the rest of the British public, became members of a liberating nation.[144] The following chapters explore 1945, the liberation year that represents the cornerstone of Britain's search for 'cognitive control' and of Britain's *own* construction of the Holocaust.

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[141] Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography, p.332.
[142] ibid, p.300.
[143] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go.
[144] News from Europe, 15 May 1945.

Chapter Two

'With Different Eyes'
The Liberation Year and The Survivors' Perspective

'At the end of the war, it seems that the official confirmation of the extent of the extermination policy shocked even those who had campaigned for the Jews rescue.'[1] In his close analysis of the immediate post war responses of Jewish and non-Jewish observers in Britain to the revelations of the liberation year of 1945, Dan Stone explores the palpable sense of shock that year created in this country. It was a sense of shock found even amongst those individuals whose foresight regarding Nazi policy had placed them at the heart of the call for British involvement in the rescue of Europe's Jews. Indeed in his preface to his 1946 work Emergence of the Jewish Problem, 1878 – 1939, James Parkes explained to his readers, 'this volume brings the story down to 1939, because it is still too early to get into perspective the disastrous events which have befallen Jewry during the years of the war. It will be some time before the sequel can be written.'[2] With the end of the Second World War, the emotionally and physically exhausted members of the National Committee for Rescue joined the rest of the British public in experiencing and witnessing the events of 1945. It was to be a cornerstone year both in Britain's relationship with the destruction of European Jewry and in the inclusion of that destruction process within an enduring narrative of British national identity. From a variety of perspectives that centralise individual and personal responses the following three chapters of this study will explore the impact and place of 1945 in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust and in the construction of the nation's own controlled and manageable version of the event. The events of the liberation year of 1945 are crucial in understanding Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. The meeting point between the British public and the physical evidence of the Nazi exterminatory policies came with the liberation of the western European concentration camps in the spring of 1945. The shock that had left James Parkes struggling for perspective was shared and was rooted in the filmic and

[1] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence: Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain, 1945 – 6', in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), p.23.
[2] James Parkes, Emergence of the Jewish Problem, 1878 – 1939, (Oxford University Press, London, 1946).

photographic images of the victims and survivors of those camps that entered British society at all levels throughout 1945. If the roots of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust can be found in the words of an individual like Parkes or in the actions of a small group of campaigners, then no less revealing here are the voices of those individuals who were liberated by the British and Allied forces in the spring and summer of 1945. A focus on the accounts of those survivors liberated at Belsen widens our perspective on the camp at the centre of Britain's understanding of the Holocaust. Responses to the liberation of the camps, most significantly to the British liberated Bergen Belsen, represent in concentrated form the complexity of this country's relationship with the destruction process during the years before 1945. Such responses are also the defining factor in understanding and explaining Britain's attempt to bring the Holocaust under 'cognitive control' in the period since the liberation year.[3] The events of liberation now occupy a central position in British present day representations of the Holocaust, of Britain's *own* Holocaust. In 1945 Britain became a liberating nation. It is a perceived role that has shaped its relationship with the Holocaust and its victims, survivors and, indeed, with its perpetrators ever since.

But why draw on the words and memories of a hugely diverse range of Holocaust survivors with multiple experiences, using many languages and methods of representation in a study dedicated to the partnership between Britain and the Holocaust? Firstly, it is in British response to *their* suffering, in British understanding (or lack of) of *their* identities in 1945 and in British representations of *their* experience today that we seek the roots of Britain's connection with the process designed to ensure *their* destruction. However survivor testimony does not simply act as a 'provider of colour or texture' in the story of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. It is part of that story: a rich and complicated part of that story, that as Tony Kushner concludes, 'has to be taken seriously on its own terms as life history of ordinary people before, during and after persecution'. [4] The testimony of the liberated will further undermine Jon Bridgman's account of liberation as 'the end of the Holocaust' and through changing the balance of perspective from that of the liberators

[3] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence,' p.24.
[4] Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony', in Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, The Holocaust: Critical Historical Approaches, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005), p.45.

to that of the liberated, survivor testimony will challenge his careful classification of the 'classic', 'spontaneous' and 'transfer' liberation experience.[5] Instead survivor accounts expose the presence of diverse concepts of liberation that cannot be so easily constrained. Survivor narratives also make clear the challenges that the realities of 1945 pose to any simple definition of both what it meant to be liberated and what it means to be a liberating nation. The individualised nature of testimony highlights important differences, both then and now, between individual survivors and crucially between the liberated and the liberators in their perception of liberation. Testimony also exposes a distinction between the act of liberation and the idea of liberation that allowed survivor Primo Levi to argue that testimony construction itself could be defined as 'an interior liberation'.[6] If 1945 and the act of liberation represents a time so vital in the meeting between Britishness and the Holocaust, then survivor narratives illustrate that whilst the survivors of the Holocaust and their liberators shared the day of liberation in 1945, their subsequent memories and representations of that time and experience differ significantly. The construction of testimony *is* another search for control and as such the survivors who write and give testimony share the need for control that underpins British constructions of the Holocaust. Both survivors and the British liberators attempted to search for a context for the destruction process in the familiar. However the act of control, the version of the Holocaust that is built and presented by the survivors and by the liberating nation is grounded in definitions of identity, place, home and belonging that ultimately are constructed totally differently. If, in response to the events and images of 1945, Britain sought, and continues to seek, a place for the destruction process within the narratives of national identity and within a perception of what it means to be British and to belong in Britain, then that contrasts radically with a version of liberation and of the Holocaust built by individual survivors for whom notions of home and of self have been disrupted, utterly redefined and in some cases made essentially redundant by the Holocaust. If the Holocaust is *part* of British collective memory, then it is *central* to the lives of the survivors, both as individuals and as a group, and the change in perspective created by that fact illustrates how far the meeting point between the liberated and the liberators is essentially limited to the act of liberation. There may be

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[5] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps, (B.T.Batsford, London, 1990), p.12.

[6] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, (Vintage, London, 1996), p.15. Originally published as Se Questo e Un Uomo, (Gilulio Einaudi, Italy, 1958).

dominant constructions of memory, but these are not unified or uncontested. The plurality of the survivor voices explored in this chapter will also leave open the possibility that British constructions and memories of liberation are equally diverse. The diversity of testimony itself and the modes of its representation in Britain, proves the extent to which Britain's memory and representation of 1945, both then and now, is wholly a part of a construction of the Holocaust filtered through an understanding of Britishness, however defined.

The complicated interplay between definitions of British (and Allied) national identity, notions of Holocaust memory and survivor testimony makes clear that such narratives are, and always have been, far more than Peter Novick's 'peg' on which constructed British and American 'collective memories' of the Holocaust are perceived to hang. Novick's The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience identifies survivors and their testimony as providing a sustaining and symbolic presence in a constructed American memory of the Holocaust.[7] In offering his own interpretation of Maurice Halbwach's memory theory, Novick defines a collective memory as one 'that simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes'.[8] From within that constructed collective memory, it is argued, survivors or rather the symbol of the survivor is *used* in American society, becoming an expected element in any discussion of the Holocaust and one whose absence 'from the scene seems likely to reduce the salience of the Holocaust' in that country.[9] Despite their frequent appearance in what he calls American 'coverage' of the Holocaust – an interesting choice of word that brings to mind the transitory, disconnected, ultimately impersonal interest given to a news item on an unrelated event by an onlooker, by a '*bystander*' perhaps - Novick goes on to argue that survivor memories 'are not a very useful historical source; or, rather, some may be but we don't know which ones'.[10] The statement is an important one, both in terms of the relationship between survivor testimony and the historian and, perhaps most significantly in terms of the limitations of Novick's definition of collective memory when applied to Britain's relationship

[7] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, (Bloomsbury, London, 2000), p.276.
[8] ibid, p.4 and with reference to Maurice Halbwachs' memory work, see Lewis Coser, (ed), On Collective Memory: Maurice Halbwachs, (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1992).
[9] ibid, p.275.
[10] ibid, p.275.

with the Holocaust. Firstly, whilst Novick does not explain what he considers to be useful historical source material, it is clear that Holocaust survivor testimony has always challenged some of the basic premises of the historical discipline, not least in the classification of source material. In a statement that might be said to echo the response of many in Britain to the revelations of the liberation year and to the facts of the destruction process, historian G.R. Elton stated that, 'the historian cannot but work on the assumption that whatever happened is capable of a rational explanation and that evidence is the product of an act discoverable by reason'.[11] Indeed perhaps historians may themselves be engaged in their own search for a type of control in the study of the Holocaust. The concept of historical method as the reasoned search for the 'fact' of an event is long established. Such historiography teaches that the identification and categorisation of a source is the result of the historian's application of a series of questions determined by his/her original hypothesis with the aim of establishing the reliability and thus the 'value' or 'usefulness' of the source. Through a process that John Tosh has called 'external criticism', the author and date of the source are established as accurately as possible. The motive and intended audience for the source are investigated through 'internal criticism' of its content.[12] Distinctions are subsequently drawn between what is referred to as 'primary' and 'secondary' source material. The definition of that which should or should not constitute a primary or secondary source is subject to debate, as Tosh suggests, 'The distinction between primary and secondary sources, fundamental though it is to historical research, is rather less clear cut than it might appear at first sight;' not least perhaps in those examples when 'the distinction between primary and secondary source material may appear in the same work' or when 'a work can be primary in one context and secondary in another'.[13] For the historian described by Tosh as a 'purist', the testimony of anyone who was not an eyewitness to an event must be secondary, whilst for others a secondary source is that which may have been written by that same eyewitness, but after the event described. For Tosh the most valuable of sources are those that are written without regard for posterity so that the role of the historian is then to seek for what Marc Bloch called, 'the evidence of witnesses in spite of

[11] G.R. Elton, The Practice of History, (Fontana Press, London, 1987), p.105.
[12] John Tosh, The Pursuit of History, (Longman, London, 1991), p.57.
[13] ibid, pp.33/34.

themselves'.[14] Holocaust survivor testimony, written for posterity, capable of providing evidence 'in spite of itself', altered in meaning and impact with the smallest change in context, use and representation and as a product of an inherently disruptive event may ultimately threaten to undermine such categorisation of source material completely. It does require, a new, if challenging approach from the historian. It should also remind us that it is the original content of a 'source' and not its categorisation that is the key to the historical event of which it is a product, as Robert Eaglestone suggests in relation to Holocaust survivor testimony, 'Testimony is witness to these events and should not be reduced simply to an historical account or a documentary novel (these are both ways of reducing otherness to the same); it is part of a genre of its own. And it is this genre – one that is strange not least because it denies the commonly accepted process of identification – that reveals the truth of the Holocaust.'[15]

Undoubtedly, as Dominick LaCapra comments, memory 'poses questions to history' and the body of scholarship on the relationship between memory, survivor testimony and the Holocaust is indeed extensive and complicated.[16] For example, in his study of the influence of memory in Holocaust testimony, specifically, in oral testimony, Lawrence Langer identifies no less than five types of memory; 'deep memory, anguished memory, humiliated memory, tainted memory and unheroic memory', whilst James Young has explored what he calls 'the texture of memory' in a study of Holocaust memorials and 'memory sites'.[17] In testimony, survivors must struggle with the basic challenge of recollection over time and through trauma.[18] The survivor often battles a compulsion to remember that extends to a need to bear witness with a recognition that the nature of their experience may have left some events, some memories, unreachable and impossible to record. The need to remember also often goes beyond the personal and focuses instead on those who did not survive. For

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[14] In John Tosh, The Pursuit of History, p.34.
[15] Robert Eaglestone, 'Identification and the Genre of Testimony', in Sue Vice, (ed), Representing the Holocaust, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2003), p.137/8.
[16] Dominick LaCapra, History and Memory After Auschwitz, (Cornell University Press, New York, 1998), p.8.
[17] Lawrence Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991) and James Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993).
[18] The use of the word 'trauma' in this context is not intended as a signifier of a belief in the Freudian definition of trauma and the theory of the 'return of the repressed' that Novick himself takes issue with in his attempt to classify collective memory, p.3.

example, for Belsen survivor Bertha Ferderber Salz, liberated in Bergen Belsen, it is the murdered who shape what she remembers and how she records that memory; 'From where did I get the strength to record those events, to sink once again into the events of the past...perhaps the sighs of those who were burned and slaughtered dictated to me what I should write.'[19] Memory then becomes part of an obligation infused with the guilt of survival that dominates what Levi has called 'survivor syndrome', the symptoms of which A.H.Rosenfeld describes in an essay on Levi, as, 'the diminution of energy, a wearing away of vitality, the heavy burden of guilt and shame, a slow but ultimate collapse of the will to live'.[20] Levi himself writes; 'for these survivors remembering is a duty. They do not want to forget, because they understand their experiences were not meaningless, that the camps were not an accident, an unforeseen historical happening'.[21]

Adding survivor memories to a complicated and often unexplained mass of memory types including, 'important', 'consequential', 'relatively inconsequential' and 'honoury', Novick argues that it is the memory dependent elements of survivor testimony that make it 'unreliable' as source material. However, the assumed historical 'unreliability' of these narratives has apparently neither stopped their use as 'emotionally powerful elements' in American Holocaust museums nor their making a valid contribution 'in evoking the Holocaust experience'.[22] And thus for the study of *what* exactly does Novick consider survivor testimony to be of limited use? The relative usefulness of source material depends on the questions asked of it and specifically in the case of Holocaust related material that judgement is wholly related to our expectations of what testimony can or should provide. Novick suggests that whilst providing an opportunity in a Holocaust museum for 'enhanced empathy with those who underwent the experience' something that is, he concedes 'surely legitimate', the inherent unreliability of survivor testimony means that that must be the total extent of its role.[23] The implication is that testimony cannot and does not have the credentials of the more 'accurate' and valuable, but still unidentified 'historical source material' required by Novick's understanding of Holocaust

[19] Bertha Ferderber Salz, And the Sun Kept Shining, (Holocaust Library, New York, 1980), p.18.
[20] A.H. Rosenfeld, 'Primo Levi – The Survivor as Victim', in J. Pacy and A. Wertheimer, (eds), Perspectives on the Holocaust, (Westview Press, Oxford, 1995), p.33.
[21] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, p.390.
[22] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, p.275.
[23] ibid, p.275.

research. It is that enforced distinction between the discipline of History or what Novick calls 'historic consciousness',[24] memory and Holocaust survivor testimony that allows testimony, that which perhaps more than any other 'source material' centralises, rather than simply evokes the Holocaust, to be instead relegated to the 'colour and texture' of Holocaust history. It might also mean that we miss the part played by survivor testimony in the relationship between countries like Britain, America and the Holocaust.

Novick's understanding of collective memory and its operation in the United States is determined by the fact that he takes as his starting point the belief that America is a 'bystander' nation to the Holocaust. That allows him to ask of the presence of a Holocaust memory in the States, 'Why here?'[25] He concludes that the Holocaust cannot be part of a collective American memory because of the physical and psychological distance between its events and the American nation; 'one way that an historical occurrence becomes deeply embedded in collective consciousness is when it serves to define the group, remind people of "who they are". The Holocaust is simply too remote from the experience of Americans for it to perform that function'.[26] The idea that the Holocaust is disconnected from America leaves the presence of a Holocaust memory in that country as nothing more than a construct, the result of a series of choices made by the group that reflect the concerns of the group in the present and determine what is and is not 'remembered'. If however, one starts from the alternative premise that underpins this study of Britain and the Holocaust, namely that Britain, and indeed America, are not simply bystanders to the Holocaust and that in fact the event is part of their national narrative, then the perspective on collective memory is significantly different from that offered by Novick. In identifying the impact of memory that he regards as the reason for survivor testimony's unreliability, Novick uses the words of one of the most prominent survivor writers, Primo Levi; 'The greater part of the witnesses have ever more blurred and stylised memories often, unbeknownst to them, influenced by information gained from later readings or the stories of others. A memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype...crystallized, perfected, adorned,

[24] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, p.4.
[25] ibid, p.2.
[26] ibid, p.278.

installing itself in the place of raw memory and growing at its expense.'[27] Levi's words might be read as a statement on the damaging effects of human memory on the content of testimony. They may also be read, however, as evidence of the impact on testimony of the environment in which survivors find themselves, of the demands and expectations made of them and of the role carved out for them by those around them. Although important in reminding us that survivor testimonies are what Lawrence Langer has called 'human documents' in which crucially, 'the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy', it is not perhaps Levi's description of survivor memory as 'blurred or stylised' that is most significant here.[28] It is instead that those memories are 'influenced by information gained from later readings or the stories of **others**'. (my emphasis) Levi does not suggest that those influences are limited to the words of other survivors. If survivor memories are affected, then Levi suggests, it is something that is externally imposed, crucially that it is something, 'unbeknownst' to many of the survivors. If the change may not even be something of which the survivors themselves are aware, then perhaps we should question the factors in the environment surrounding the survivor that have created a situation in which a survivor memory is 'evoked too often'. If we alter our perspective and importantly, our *expectations* of testimony in this way, then rather than creating unreliable source material, the fallibility of survivor memory and the use and representation of survivor testimony becomes a key signpost for the relationship between that testimony and the environment - *the country* - in which it is given, received and represented. Survivor testimony may after all be one of Novick's most important 'sources' for the 'American experience' of the Holocaust that he purports to seek. The use of testimony and its emotional impact in, for example, the Holocaust museum is no longer secondary to a notion of historical 'accuracy' but is instead the evidence of choices made with regard to representation that are witness to the meeting between notions of national identity and the Holocaust. A museum curator's selection of a particular testimony, their chosen mode of representation, even the location and duration of a testimony in an exhibition is then a window on the memory and representation of a nation's *own* Holocaust – as explored further with regard to Britain in Chapter Five of this study. What is evoked in Britain and

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[27] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, p.275 and with reference to Primo Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, (Abacus, London, 1989), p.19.
[28] Lawrence Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, p.xv.

America's use of testimony is the version of the Holocaust that each nation is building for itself. The testimony of a survivor is no longer simply the 'added colour' for 'Holocaust coverage'; instead the perceived need for that survivor's presence suggests a relationship with the destruction process in that country that cannot be constrained by the term 'bystander'. Nor can that need be then explained as a 'memory spasm', with the implication that it is a product of the here and now, utterly disconnected from the past event, and serving only as a witness to a country's contemporary concern (or attempt to avoid confrontation) with an unrelated event.[29] Finally, if testimony is part of that relationship between countries like Britain, America and the Holocaust, if its use and representation can reveal the continuation of that relationship today, then the answer to Elie Wiesel's status as America's 'emblematic survivor' lies not simply in his prolific work or in his role as a sustaining force in the discourse on the uniqueness of the Holocaust that Novick identifies.[30] Rather, it lies in Novick's own brief and undeveloped description of Wiesel and a crucial moment in his – *and America's* - Holocaust experience; 'His gaunt face, with its anguished expression, seemed to freeze time – to be staring out from a 1945 photograph of the liberation of the camps.'[31] Alongside Britain, America became a liberating nation in 1945. In Wiesel, liberated from Buchenwald by American troops, America found and continues to find the emblem and confirmation of that liberating identity. The liberated Wiesel and that frozen moment in the liberated Buchenwald of 1945, reminds Americans of 'who they are', confirming an idea of freedom that is central to American national identity. The Wiesel who 'stares out' from the 1945 liberation photograph is emblematic of America's *own* Holocaust. That a closer reading of his testimony and of that of Primo Levi, the other survivor key to Novick's argument, should expose a far more ambiguous and multi-layered memory of liberation and a search for control rooted in a radically different conception of identity and freedom provides not only a vital alternative reading of the liberation year, but also undermines any suggestion that the liberators and the liberated might share a 'collective memory' of the Holocaust. Their response to and attempted assimilation of survivor testimony in later representations of the Holocaust is instead the continuing proof that Britain and America's memory of, and relationship with, the 'Holocaust' is their *own*.

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[29] Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, p.4.
[30] ibid, p.273.
[31] ibid, p.273.

Whilst America found in Wiesel and the photograph that captured his liberation from Buchenwald in 1945 the confirmation of an American definition of freedom, some forty five years after the arrival of his American liberators, Wiesel himself still asked 'What really makes us free?'[32] Both Wiesel and Levi, two of the most influential and widely referenced Holocaust survivor writers, are occupied by the concept of freedom and the significance of their liberation in the writing and re-writing of their Holocaust testimonies; their work, written from their perspective as survivors, centralises the Holocaust in a way that Britain (and America) cannot share. Wiesel's experience of liberation in 1945 did not provide him with an answer to his question, illustrating that for many survivors the day of liberation did not signal the end of their Holocaust experience and that such an experience had redefined any notion of freedom in its aftermath. Wiesel's understanding of freedom is controlled by his experience and memory of the destruction process. In his attempt to answer his own question, Wiesel is unable to disentangle his explanation of freedom from his experience of captivity. The Holocaust, rather than simply just removing Wiesel's physical freedom during his captivity in Auschwitz Birkenau and at Buchenwald has also left him unable to conceive of freedom without being forced to return to those days and experiences in the camps. Freedom is now shaped, tempered and measured by and against the Holocaust so that, for Wiesel, to speak of freedom is in fact to never be free from Auschwitz; 'it is often the prisoner who is truly free'.[33] Wiesel's understanding of freedom is now based on the opposition between the prisoner and their captor and the maintenance of a sense of freedom is a key battleground in the fight for survival, a means to 'say no to the enemy, of showing that we were free, freer than the enemy'.[34] Wiesel suggests that the prisoners' ability to retain a sense of freedom is a means by which to sustain themselves and to mark out a psychological, even moral distance between themselves and their persecutors. And yet that freedom is only defined by the need to be 'freer than the enemy' so that the destruction process, rather than being displaced by a prisoner's attempt to 'say no' is in fact centralised; what should represent an inherent contradiction, namely that the Holocaust defines freedom, becomes the bitter truth for the prisoner and the inescapable and enduring reality for

[32] Elie Wiesel, 'What really makes us free?' in The Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences, (Schocken Books, New York, 1990).
[33] ibid, p.219.
[34] ibid, p.219

the future survivor that will mean that to speak of freedom is always to speak of the Holocaust. Wiesel argues that 'it is by his freedom that a man knows himself' and undoubtedly his American liberators and those British troops who arrived in Bergen Belsen in the spring of 1945 would have agreed.[35] Yet Wiesel's 'freedom' is not grounded in a narrative of national identity but in the event designed to destroy him. In an act that confirmed their own definition of freedom, the Allies liberated Wiesel from Buchenwald. They did not, and could not, free him from the Holocaust.

For Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi the experience of survivorship ensured that as writers they, and many other survivors, would become unable to speak of a 'past life' as something distinct from the Holocaust. Instead each aspect of their lives, past, present and future became intangibly linked to the Holocaust. Wiesel and Levi prove that the roles of prisoner, survivor and writer cannot be divided. It is the Holocaust that determines what they remember and the memory of that which it destroyed provides the framework for recording such a loss. The Holocaust is centralised in the work of Wiesel and Levi in their recognition that the camps existed within a unique set of values and constituted a unique community. In the aftermath, the constraint of survivorship lies in the writers' impulse to continue to search for that which exists as myth alone, that is, 'a life before Auschwitz'. They are unable to detach themselves from their position in the Holocaust's unique community and they must face the reality that their survival and their writing facilitates the continued presence of the Holocaust experience beyond the liberation year of 1945, so that Wiesel can state, 'After Auschwitz everything long past brings us back to Auschwitz.'[36] Just as their conception of freedom cannot be disentangled from their Holocaust experience, in their testimony Wiesel and Levi find themselves unable to find the control over the Holocaust in the values and belief systems, or what James Young has called the 'governing mythoi' of their past lives.[37] Like Britain, they seek for that control and context in the familiar, in the things that define them. Unlike for Britain, those 'mythoi' cannot provide that control because, as Levi is forced to conclude, now, 'nothing is true outside the Lager'.[38]

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[35] Elie Wiesel, 'What really makes us free?' p.219.
[36] Elie Wiesel, 'Why I write' in The Kingdom of Memory, p.19.
[37] James Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990), p.10.
[38] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.398.

Young argues that 'far from transcending or displacing the events of the Holocaust, the governing mythoi of these writers are actually central to their experiences'.[39] In the case of Wiesel and Levi, the mythoi of each writer, governed by religion and family and by science and politics, determined their initial experiences in captivity. The distinction between the two remained in their writing. Wiesel lost his childhood, his family and suffered a temporary loss of faith in Auschwitz so that he states, 'in the depths of my heart I felt a great void'.[40] Much older than Wiesel at the moment of his imprisonment, Levi's life had been built in peacetime during which he had developed a faith in humanity and in the reason of science. Auschwitz would profoundly undermine that belief and force him to begin again, the only source of education being Auschwitz itself, so that he comments, 'A friend of mine, who was deported to the women's camp of Ravensbruck, says that the camp was her university. I think I can say the same thing.'[41] As survivor writers, Wiesel and Levi face the reality that it had not been the struggle for the retention of selfhood grounded in the mythoi of their past lives that had facilitated their survival, but rather the often subconscious adoption of the very principles designed to destroy that Self in the mythoi of the camp, as Levi suggests, 'One learns quickly enough to wipe out the past and the future when one is forced to.'[42] The lesson that survival was essentially linked to participation in the destruction of others lies in the words of the German guard who tells Levi in Auschwitz, 'Heir ist kein warum.' Levi's response is illustrative of his gradual recognition of the 'rules'; 'in this place everything is forbidden, not for hidden reasons, but because the camp has been created for that purpose. If one wants to live one must learn this quickly and well'.[43] Both writers express guilt at their survival, something common to many survivors. They see in it a degree of complicity with Auschwitz, writing to free themselves of the constant connection to the Holocaust and yet, increasingly aware of the impossibility of such an act, finally accepting its position as the sole defining truth in their lives.

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[39] James Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, p.10.
[40] Elie Wiesel, Night, (Penguin, London, 1981), p.81.
[41] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.398.
[42] ibid, p.42.
[43] ibid, p.35.

Wiesel states that, 'It seemed as impossible to conceive of Auschwitz with God as to conceive of Auschwitz without God' and the central theme of Night is the writer's difficult transition from a profound belief in God to the breakdown of that faith in Auschwitz.[44] Wiesel's childhood beliefs or mythoi were shaped by his initiation into the mysticism of the Kabalah through Mosche the Beadle, whose challenging question, 'Why do you pray?'[45], Wiesel later asked himself in the camp. His response, 'I don't know', that before had signalled unquestioned faith, is now replaced with a true sense of futility and a lack of comprehension; 'Where is God now? And I heard a voice within me answer him; Where is he? Here He is – He is hanging here on the gallows.'[46] Wiesel sees the death of his God in Auschwitz whilst being forced to describe it within the only framework he knows – a religious one, the governing mythoi of his past centralising the Auschwitz reality. His point of reference for life must become that for death; 'Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget those things even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself.'[47] Almost subconsciously, Wiesel describes both the death and the eternal life of his God in one statement reflecting his incomplete transition from the past to the world of Auschwitz. Wiesel seeks to contain Auschwitz within the structures of Judaism that had been his source of security before, always seeking the reassurance of the familiar. He draws on the festivals and Holy Days of the Jewish calendar throughout Night but ultimately their value to him is negated by their association with the camp; 'Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement – we fasted the whole year round. The whole year was Yom Kippur'[48] and at Rosh Hashanah, 'the last day of the year. The word 'last' rang very strangely. What if it were indeed the last day of the year?'[49] In an attempt to face the grim truth that whilst there is Auschwitz, as Levi said, there can be no God, Wiesel has only two realities from which to draw: his religious past and the present of Auschwitz. Wiesel is left unable to disentangle himself from mythoi that could never have conceived of Auschwitz and yet from which he continues to seek answers; 'I did not deny God's existence, but I doubted His absolute justice.'[50] For Wiesel, 'the tragedy of the

[44] Elie Wiesel, The Nobel Lecture 1986 in The Kingdom of Memory, p.242.
[45] Elie Wiesel, Night, p.14.
[46] ibid, p.77.
[47] ibid, p.45.
[48] ibid, p.80.
[49] ibid, p.77.
[50] ibid, p.57.

believer is much greater than the tragedy of the non believer', yet both writers address the role of God with a similar sense of hopelessness.[51] Using subtly religious terminology, Levi makes a distinction between the 'drowned and the saved' and speaks of having been given a glimpse of a law in Auschwitz that states, 'to he that has will be given; to he that has not, will be taken away'.[52] Ultimately Levi asks of the survivors' testimonies, 'are they not themselves stories of a new Bible?'[53]

Reflected in the confrontation between the worlds of science, religion and the Holocaust is the writers' struggle with language, a recurrent theme in survivor testimony. Wiesel comments, 'All words seemed inadequate, worn, foolish, lifeless, whereas I wanted them to sear. Where was I to discover a fresh vocabulary, a primeval language?'[54] Wiesel's language is an impressionist series of reflections and his testimony, Night, is dreamlike, often lulling the reader into a false sense of security, only to be woken repeating the panicked questions of the author; 'Was I still alive? Was I awake? I could not believe it. How could it be possible for them to burn people, children and for the world to keep silent? No, none of this could be true. It was a nightmare.'[55] Levi writes with a sense of controlled panic, a deceptively cool observation of the daily running of the camp: 'such will be our life. Every day, according to the established rhythm, ausrucken and einrucken, go out, come in, sleep, eat; fall ill, get better or die'.[56] The text is dense with detail as Levi undergoes the transformation from scientist in freedom, to witness of his own imprisonment. The scientist's subject for observation becomes humanity itself and Levi comments, 'We would like to consider that the Lager was pre – eminently a gigantic biological and social experiment.'[57] However, Levi's use of the conditional tense betrays doubt over the extent to which the laws of reason can be applied to Auschwitz. The language of the scholar exists in stark contrast to the scene it seeks to describe, but it is all he has; 'Man's capacity to dig himself in. to secrete a shell, to build around himself a tenuous barrier of defence even in apparently desperate circumstances is astonishing and

[51] Elie Wiesel, 'The Nobel Lecture 1986' in The Kingdom of Memory, p.242.
[52] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.94.
[53] ibid, p.72.
[54] Elie Wiesel, 'Why I write' in The Kingdom of Memory, p.15.
[55] Elie Wiesel, Night, p.43.
[56] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.93
[57] ibid, p.93.

merits serious study.'[58] Many of the challenges to be faced in using survivor testimony in an attempt to record how prisoners struggled to gain their own 'cognitive control' over their Holocaust experience stem from the literary nature of written testimony. Dominick LaCapra has described survivor testimony as a 'prevalent and important genre of non fiction that raises the problem of interplay between fact and fantasy'[59] and Lawrence Langer concludes, 'even memoirs ostensibly concerned with nothing more ambitious than recording horrible facts cannot escape from traditional literary associations'.[60] The fact that in constructing a written testimony the survivor must rely not only on their memories, but also on the conventions of a literary format has meant that much of the analysis of their testimony surrounds the relationship between literature and History and their respective roles in the study of the Holocaust. As Hayden White comments, often 'history has served a kind of archetype of the realistic pole of representation' so that 'history can be set over against literature by virtue of its interest in the 'actual' rather than the possible'.[61] Primo Levi himself remarked, 'My books are not history books.' Often perceived distinction between what Novick might call the 'accuracy' of historical analysis and the artistic, even fictional associations of literature returns us to the question of what constitutes Holocaust 'source material.' We are also forced to consider again our expectations of Holocaust survivor testimony. In the 'survivor writer' the symptoms of Levi's survivor syndrome are combined with the challenges of transferring memory to the written page and with confronting the possibility that in so doing those memories may be misrepresented or misunderstood as a result of their encounter with what Levi called, 'the world of the written word'.[62] The Holocaust, it is argued, is at risk of being displaced through the distortions of the literary representation of personal memories. The majority of survivors had not written anything prior to their experience of the Holocaust and Levi himself remarked, 'if I had not lived the Auschwitz experience, I probably would never have written anything. I would not have had the motivation, the incentive, to write'.[63] His writing, he suggests, is further evidence of the way in which the Holocaust cast him in a new role, distancing him

[58] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.62.
[59] Dominick LaCapra, History and Memory After Auschwitz, p.11.
[60] Lawrence Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, p.2.
[61] Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact' in R.H. Canary and H. Kozicki, (eds), The Writing of History, (University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1978), p.42.
[62] Primo Levi, If This is a Man p.397.
[63] ibid, p.397.

further from a world 'before'. The partnership between a need to survive, to write and to remember, or to speak for those who did not survive, shapes the content of many testimonies, so that James Young concludes, 'when survival and the need to bear witness become one and the same longing, this desperate urge to testify in narrative cannot be underestimated'.[64] Survivor writers like Wiesel and Levi feared that the very process of writing would disassociate their testimony from the reality it portrayed and James Young concludes, 'Holocaust survivors suspect that if events are perceived after the fact as coming to exist only in their literary testimony, then their experiences might also be perceived as having never existed outside of their narrative.'[65] Both Wiesel and Levi were compelled to reassert the factuality of their accounts, fearing that their words would not be believed and leaving Levi to comment, 'I thought my account would be all the more credible and useful the more it appeared objective and the less it sounded overly emotional.'[66] To recognise the spiritual mysticism of Night, Wiesel's later beliefs with regard to the mythologisation of the Holocaust or Levi's conscious attempts to control the tone of his writing, is not to render the testimony inaccessible to History, especially when James Young reminds us that 'when we turn to literary testimony of the Holocaust, we do so for knowledge – not evidence of events'.[67] Furthermore, written testimony in particular may also illustrate another search for 'control' within the boundaries of a literary narrative structure. That process may be compared to the same search for control in the assimilation of the destruction process within a domestic or national narrative identified in Britain's approach to the Holocaust from 1933 until the present. Young comments of literary testimony, 'For once written, events assume the mantle of coherence that narrative necessarily imposes on them, and the trauma of their unassimilability is relieved.'[68] The 'narrative voice' required by written testimony, Lawrence Langer suggests, 'seeks to impose on apparently chaotic episodes a perceived sequence'[69] and in turn A.H. Rosenfeld has pointed to our search for literary antecedents in the analysis of written survivor testimony as further evidence of a 'common need to bring it (the Holocaust) under whatever control continued

[64] James Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, p.17.
[65] ibid, p.23.
[66] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.382.
[67] James Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, p.15.
[68] ibid, p.16.
[69] Lawrence Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, p.41.

reflection may afford'.[70] The search for the familiar, for the manageable, for some means to assimilate the facts as a reaction to the disturbance generated by the Holocaust may be common then to the literary narrative of survivor testimony and to the narratives of national identity that underpin the relationship between countries like Britain and the Holocaust. Finally, Wiesel once said of Auschwitz, 'The beginning, the end; all the worlds roads, all the outcries of mankind, lead to this accursed place'[71] and for both these survivor writers, the Holocaust cannot be compartmentalised into a singular period of time, a singular, isolated episode at the margins of their lives – cannot be called 'the past'. Ultimately it is the concept of a world *without* Auschwitz that is transcended in their work. Auschwitz, even if interpreted and experienced singularly, is the central force in these writers' lives. It is positioned between their past and future, limiting access to the former through the distortions of myth and memory, whilst becoming the first and only point of departure for the latter, reinterpreting survivorship as merely a continuation of persecution and proving the caution required in any representation of the act of liberation as the final stage of the Holocaust experience.

Today Holocaust survivor testimony occupies a central position in Holocaust historiography and in the popular representations of the Holocaust. Reflecting the ever increasing interest in the Holocaust, survivor testimony is now subject to an international and increasingly technologically advanced desire to collect, preserve and record Holocaust related material that has resulted in such testimony becoming, 'the largest body of material on one event produced by those who experienced it, perhaps already totalling some 100,000 accounts'.[72] Survivors' voices are called upon in both the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and in Britain's Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition and play a central part in the events associated with Holocaust Memorial Day in the United Kingdom.[73] Survivors are now frequently requested by schools and educational bodies to share their testimonies with young people. Survivors willing to share their testimonies find themselves on an often exhausting and intensive circuit of school visits, talks and memorial events.

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[70] A.H. Rosenfeld, (ed), A Double Dying: Reflections of Holocaust Literature, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980), p.4.
[71] Elie Wiesel, The Kingdom of Memory, p.105.
[72] Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony,' p.16.
[73] The implications of the use and presentation of survivor testimony in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition are assessed further in *Chapter Five* of this study.

Testimony is also looked to as a weapon in the battle against Holocaust denial and as a means to counteract racism and to teach tolerance; in short, Holocaust survivor testimony must often shoulder the burden of a series of weighty demands made of it by modern society. One consequence of this increased focus on the survivors' testimonies can be the existence of a certain expectation that it will fill a gap or will provide a 'truth' of the Holocaust unreachable through other sources. That expectation may exert a certain degree of pressure on survivors when giving or writing their testimony to give additional space to certain aspects of their experience over others.[74] A possible consequence of the current desire, particularly in secondary education and in popular representations of the Holocaust to ensure the presence of a Holocaust survivor is that survivors and their testimony risks simply becoming the ultimate example of 'source material' or the required element for a public act of memorialisation or remembrance. In America Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation now claims to have collected 52,000 survivor testimonies from 56 countries and in more than 30 languages. Britain's Holocaust Educational Trust is currently in the process of completing a project in partnership with the Foundation that is designed to be used in conjunction with the provision for Holocaust education under the National Curriculum and is constructed around selected excerpts of the Foundation's survivor testimony video footage.[75] The Foundation's collection, housed at the University of Southern California, utilises every aspect of modern computer and audio visual technology to film, store and transport to educational and museum facilities across the world some 120,000 hours of video taped Holocaust survivor testimony. On attempting to approach the Spielberg collection one is overwhelmed both by the sheer scale of the exercise and by the incredibly complex cataloguing, indexing and storage process attached to each tape's production. Despite Isabel Wollaston's reminder that 'part of the value of video

[74] For a wider discussion of the possible implications of that sense of expectation on the content and nature of testimony see, Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony'.

[75] It is hoped that the Holocaust Educational Trust and The Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation project will consist of a program of study designed to accompany students' viewing of a series of selected and edited excerpts of survivor video testimony. Testimony is used to raise issues covered not only by the requirements of the National Curriculum's provision for History but also for Citizenship and Religious Education. It is to be hoped that it will be supported by and will provide just one element in more extensive teaching on the Holocaust (often an unreachable goal in terms of Holocaust education in British schools today that is marked by an absence of time and expertise). The use of testimony in this form and context remains problematic and is perhaps illustrative of the 'neat, packageable narrative structures' favoured by museums and films in their use of testimony that ultimately cannot do justice to the individual intricacies of the material. (Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony', p.44).

testimony lies in the fact that it makes us acutely conscious of survivors' struggle to speak by incorporating the hesitancies and silences',[76] any sense of the content or significance of an individual testimony or more importantly of the individual life and experience to which they are connected is subsumed by the processes that begin and end with the desire to collect and store, so that ultimately, 'how these video tapes are to be used beyond the merely illustrative seems to have been a question left unexplored'.[77] Whilst in many ways the increased emphasis today on the use and presence of survivors and their testimony in the likes of museums, exhibitions, educational products and documentaries in Britain does represent a change from the years immediately after 1945 when many survivors found themselves marginalized and unheard, the use and place of testimony remains a signpost for the still complicated relationship between the event it represents and Britain.

'A testimony is an encounter with otherness: it constitutes such an encounter precisely because identification – a grasping or comprehension which reduces otherness to the same, events outside one's framework reduced to events inside one's framework – cannot (or should not) happen.'[78] At the outset Holocaust survivor testimony has challenged the very ability of historical analysis to account for its content and for the circumstances of its production. For the first historians of the Holocaust what was regarded as the questionable reliability of testimony and its limited ability to contribute to the story of the destruction process and its perpetrators meant that it remained largely unused. The status of testimony in the first historical works on the Holocaust mirrored in many cases the marginalised status survivors held in the world after 1945. In the introduction to her written testimony Auschwitz and Belsen survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch provides a brief glimpse of the world survivors faced and importantly of the reception she was to receive on arrival in England; 'When we first came to England, Renate and I badly wanted to talk, but no one asked us any questions. Very probably it would have been easier to ply us with food than listen to our stories. I don't mean to criticise, but I would just like to tell it as it was. Soon the magic moment passed. We no longer felt like talking and settled for a kind of

[76] Isabel Wollaston, A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance, (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London, 1996), p.22.
[77] Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony', p.43.
[78] Robert Eaglestone, 'Identification and the Genre of Testimony', pp.137/8.

isolation which in time became second nature.'[79] The increased emphasis on testimony and the survivor today is positive in comparison but not unproblematic. Historians now face the challenge of using material that for some has a sacred and untouchable status so that the use of testimony has 'developed, in contrast to initial disinterest and even antipathy, into something akin to a state of awe'.[80] It is a situation that has a very real effect on the successful use and analysis of testimony. For example a postgraduate student on being asked recently to comment on the experience of liberation as represented in survivor testimony answered that he was unable to do so. He explained that he believed it to be both impossible for him to add anything on the subject and that it was a morally questionable exercise to use testimony as a means to comment on the responses or feelings of a Holocaust survivor.[81] The reverence attached to the use of testimony is thus part of a wider discussion regarding our ability to 'know' or 'understand' the Holocaust that often falls into 'two broad schools of thought' with those for whom 'the Holocaust is ultimately incomprehensible' on one side and those who assert 'that the Holocaust is as explicable as any other experience' on the other.[82] It is a situation, as Isabel Wollaston suggests, that has meant that even the act of naming the destruction process and of writing that name may be interpreted as a signifier of a particular stance on the debate surrounding uniqueness and accessibility; 'To capitalise "Holocaust" is to assert the uniqueness of these events; to refuse to do so is to distance oneself from such an assertion.'[83] An acceptance that we can never claim to 'know' the experiences recounted in testimony must nevertheless be balanced with recognition of the need to record the Holocaust as an event perpetrated by individuals against individuals. If not, the historian is confronted with the difficulty of exploring an event that, as a result of that very assertion for sacredness or for the existence of a 'sacred realm' as Elie Wiesel would have it, is at constant risk of becoming a mythical entity.[84] The Holocaust becomes Lawrence Langer's 'permanent hole in the ozone layer of

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[79] Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth 1939 – 1945 The Documented Experiences of a Survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen, (DLM, London, 1996), Introduction.
[80] Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony', p.19.
[81] The student was taking the Masters course, 'Britain, America and the Holocaust, 1933 to the Present' at the University of Southampton, February to May 2006 and had been asked to give a presentation entitled, 'What did it mean to be liberated for the survivors of the Holocaust?' based on reading and analysis of survivor testimony.
[82] Isabel Wollaston, A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance, p.21.
[83] ibid, p.3.
[84] I. Abrahamson, (ed), Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel, (Holocaust Library, New York, 1985).

history'[85] if, instead of embracing its challenges we concede defeat in the analysis of survivor testimony simply because it is, as a product of the Holocaust, 'disruptive and difficult'.[86] The representation of the act and experience of liberation in testimony illustrates both those challenges and the central significance of testimony in piecing together a picture of this crucial moment in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust.

Liberation constitutes a vital part of their written Holocaust testimony for survivors. The survivors' conception of the relationship between their sense of freedom and the experience of liberation is at the core of understanding their representation of that event in their testimonies. Whilst many survivors recognised the inherent connection between their physical freedom and the day of liberation, few made the connection between the events of 1945 and a true sense of freedom from what had happened to them. As Wiesel and Levi's work has illustrated, 1945 often marked the starting point of a life long attempt to understand a freedom that could not be disconnected from the Holocaust. Many survivor testimonies simply undermine the use of the phrase 'liberation' itself with its positive connotations – the 'smiling' and 'flag waving' of Jon Bridgman's 'classic' liberation - in any attempt to describe the events of 1945. Often the arrival of Allied troops is accounted for at the conclusion of the survivor writers' testimonies. The position of that account at the end of such written work may appear to bear out the commonly accepted vision of liberation as the final act of the war and of the Holocaust. Yet liberation is rarely successfully confined to the concluding chapters of this work. Rather the hope and thought of liberation pervade much of the testimony. That hope also shaped the reality of the writers' experience in captivity as Joanne Reilly has commented, 'latent hope of impending liberation was fostered for weeks'.[87] In turn liberation itself rarely stands for the conclusion of the testimony writers' Holocaust experience. Instead what becomes clear is that a distinction exists between the events of the day of liberation itself and the writers' notion of liberation and what it meant to be free in the years afterwards. Like Wiesel and Levi, a survivor writer may provide their reader with an account of the events of their liberation day; the language they use, what they choose to include and omit, even the structure of their testimony and often their subsequent writings or comments

[85] Lawrence Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, Preface, p.xv.
[86] Tony Kushner, 'The Victims: Dealing with Testimony', p.43.
[87] Joanne Reilly, Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, (Routledge, London, 1998), p.26.

suggest that the association between freedom and that day is not as easily made as it was, and is, for their British liberators. Liberation as a concept is intimately connected to the personal details of the writer's experience during the Holocaust years and before, and to the way in which they attempt to come to terms with the realities of their survival.

Testimony suggests that the day of liberation was an illusory event that existed on the parameters of the captives' world. It seemed perpetually out of reach. Liberation appears in the testimonies of Holocaust survivors as a source of frustration and fear. A preoccupation with the progress of the Allied armies, of the potential liberators, led to frustration and doubt about the possibilities of survival. The thought of liberation prompted thoughts of the past, of what had already been lost. Thinking about liberation could engender difficult questions of faith, both personal and religious and could trigger a search for meaning in what had happened that left many traumatised. Yet thoughts of liberation were a double-edged sword. They could also conjure images of reunion, joy and hope for a new start. Both before and after the day of liberation, the very idea of that day left prisoners of the Holocaust caught between opposing sets of emotions and laid down the roots of a difficult transition from captivity to survivorship. In the months before the Allies arrived, liberation existed in many forms for those incarcerated in camps like Bergen Belsen. It was a reason for perpetual hope and as German Jew, Henry Wermuth, transported to Auschwitz and liberated at Mauthausen writes, liberation became 'a tiny spark in our darkness'.[88] The need to imagine just what the day of liberation would bring was a vital part of his time in captivity. References to liberation shape the written testimony of his experience. For Wermuth 'the tiny spark' in his captive life was 'hopes of liberation and survival'.[89] Wermuth's focus on liberation illustrates the role the concept played as a sustaining force in an individual prisoner's life. That hope might not have facilitated survival; the control over survival always lay with the Nazis. Yet liberation, or the idea of liberation, could sustain hope. Wermuth indicated a concern and a preoccupation with the time and moment of his liberation. Whilst his position as a survivor and as a writer allowed him the control over detail that he might not have had as a prisoner, he remained utterly focused on the timing of his liberation; 'This must

[88] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply my Son, p.156.
[89] ibid, p.156.

have been Liberation Day minus twelve – 24th April 1945' and '27th April – Liberation Day minus eight'.[90] Wermuth records a conversation between two prisoners in the camp. The conversation makes clear the presence of liberation imagery in camp life and the doubts and fears it generated; 'if they don't hurry up we will not live to see them – it would be terrible to die now, just before seeing our tormentors trodden into the ground'.[91] The prisoners had a clear vision of just how important the speedy arrival of their liberators was and of the role they believed those liberators should play on their eventual arrival. The prisoners do not have such a clear vision of their own future and of their ability to live to see their liberators. It is perhaps noteworthy that some prisoners like Wermuth seemed to have envisaged a kind of large scale battle or physical, violent confrontation between their captors and their liberators that in the main part did not materialise during the liberation of the camps. A hoped for liberation day meant the chance to envisage the destruction of your persecutors. It also meant facing the bitter reality that you might not witness that sight. Sometimes, even with survival and after the Allied troops arrival, that hope was challenged by a disappointment in the limited nature of the liberating troops' actions. Liberation always had a darker side and Robert Abzug comments that liberation always generates two images; 'one of crowds celebrating jubilantly, pretty women greeting proud and happy soldiers' and the other depicting 'a dreadful repetition of faces without hope or comprehension, mounds of bodies piled neatly or littered on the ground'.[92] Prisoners and liberators had to come to terms with the fact that liberation was always about life and death. Abzug's description of the dual nature of liberation represents an important distinction for the Britain of 1945. In that year Britain would experience both images of liberation. It is crucial to account for the fact that the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps only momentarily received the British public's full attention before their focus turned to their own liberation from a state of war. The climate created by the very proximity of the British public's exposure to the two sides of liberation during 1945 means their responses to both cannot be analysed independently. Testimony illustrates that the very idea of liberation allowed the prisoner to construct an image of the future day of liberation. That constructed image of what the day of liberation might be like was often rocked by the realities of that

[90] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply My Son, p.184 and p.189.
[91] ibid, p.171.
[92] Robert Abzug, 'The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps', p.5.

day when, and if, it finally arrived. It was not a vision of liberation that catered for the continued persecutions handed out by desperate camp guards in the first hours after the capture of a camp by Allied troops, guards described with chilling calm by Belsen survivor Anita Lasker Wallfisch as 'an extremely trigger happy bunch'.[93] Nor could the construct of liberation account for the continued suffering wrought by starvation and disease that even the British army in the liberated Belsen could not stop. Much of Holocaust survivors' reaction to the day of liberation can be traced to their attempt to come to terms with the distance that existed between their image of liberation and its realities. Survivor testimony undermines the idea of a single definition of freedom and proves that multiple notions of liberation and of freedom had always been at the core of concentration and extermination camp existence long before the Allied troops arrived – that the survivor always envisaged freedom from a perspective that their liberators could not share.

On the morning of 27 January 1945 Primo Levi and his friend carried the dead body of their fellow prisoner from the Auschwitz hut they had shared. As Levi records in his account of that time this was the same morning that, as they stood in the snow, the Russian Army arrived and the extermination centre was officially liberated. The Russian arrival marked the starting point not only of Levi's physical freedom from the camp but also signalled the beginning of his transition from prisoner to survivor and Holocaust writer. For Levi, as for so many survivors, there exists a clear distinction between the physical experiences of liberation and his ability to achieve an emotional or psychological distance from Auschwitz. The writing becomes the (ultimately futile) means to achieve that distancing process. Its content reveals how far any understanding of liberation cannot begin and end with the actions of the Allied nations.

Like many of the relatively few prisoners abandoned by their captors in Auschwitz in January 1945 Levi was suffering from scarlet fever by the time the Russians arrived. He begins his account of the days before his liberation, 'the Story of Ten Days' with his return to the Ka-Be infirmary huts of Auschwitz. Levi describes those days

[93] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.98.

immediately before liberation as being 'outside both world and time'.[94] On his return to Ka-Be on 11 January Levi notes; 'already for some months now the distant booming of the Russian guns had been heard at intervals'.[95] Throughout the final chapter of his testimony Levi's responses to the prospect of liberation are always secondary to and tempered by his need to cope with the challenges of his immediate surroundings and with his illness. Even as 27 January draws closer it is Auschwitz and its impact upon him that consumes Levi; 'the news excited no direct emotion in me. Already for many months I had no longer felt any pain, joy or fear, except in that detached and distant manner characteristic of the Lager'.[96] Despite being surrounded by the serious illnesses of the other prisoners of Ka-Be and by the gradual destruction of Auschwitz, Levi sees in the hospital a chance for rest; 'I lay down with relief knowing that I had the right to forty days' isolation. I was lucky enough to have a bunk entirely to myself.'[97] Levi does not qualify the statement or the many others like it in his writing with comments about the relativity of apparently positive experiences in Auschwitz. Positive and negative, luck, captivity *and* liberation simply have different meanings for him.

Levi's account of Auschwitz is based on his record of the experiences and relationships of his fellow prisoners. His account of liberation follows that same focus. He notes; 'the two Frenchmen with scarlet fever were quite pleasant'.[98] It is with one of those Frenchmen, Charles, that Levi forms a lasting friendship and with whom he witnesses the arrival of the Russians. On the fifth day of his time in Ka-Be a Greek barber gives Levi his first inclination that liberation is near; 'he stopped shaving me, winked in a serious and allusive manner, pointed to the window with his chin, and then made a sweeping gesture with his hand towards the West'.[99] Levi's response centralises the impact Auschwitz has had upon him and not any vision he might have had of his liberators or their potential actions; 'if I had my former sensitivity, I thought, this would be an extremely moving moment'.[100] As if to reassert to the reader that the news had little impact upon him he begins the next paragraph;

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[94] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, p.162.
[95] ibid, p.157.
[96] ibid, p.158.
[97] ibid, p.157.
[98] ibid, p.158.
[99] ibid, p.158.
[100] ibid, p.158.

'my ideas were perfectly clear'. In Auschwitz it is essential that his mind remains clear. It is only with his voice as a writer and as a survivor that he concedes to the idea that hearing such news might have been 'a moving moment'. Even from the distanced position of survival he is concerned to ensure that his readers are not swept up in any expectation of liberation. He seems to want to avoid the possibility that any description of liberation should outweigh or detract from the details of his last experiences in the camp. Levi is aware of his readers' potential assumptions about liberation. He may sense that his readers are longing for a better ending. He is compelled to chronicle the events of his last days of captivity but his need is to do so accurately. He cannot afford for his readers to sigh with relief at the very idea of liberation. Levi is aware of a need to make clear that liberation was not always met with unquestioned joy and that it was not a straightforward experience. He must write against the tide of images conjured both by the very definition of the word liberation and by the events of 1945, images from which the voices of the survivors were largely absent.

In Auschwitz in 1945 Levi's first thoughts of liberation are negative; 'I had foreseen the dangers which would accompany the evacuation of the camp and the liberation.'[101] For Levi the prisoner, the news of impending liberation *cannot* be 'an extremely moving moment'. Only after the possibility of liberation becomes a reality and only in an effort to communicate the experience that came before, can Levi the writer and survivor consider another response – *not* in himself, but in his readers. Levi attempts to control the response of his readers to the news of liberation. In Auschwitz he is frustrated and disappointed in his fellow prisoners as the news sinks in; 'I looked at the faces of my comrades one by one; it was clearly useless to discuss it with any of them.'[102] He recognises that for the majority liberation will be too late. He is in turn cross with the newer prisoners who bombard him with questions; 'I told them so but they continued to ask questions. How stupid of them!'[103] He is unsure of the appropriate response to the possibility of liberation and he cannot find it in others. A point of reference or of context for the events of liberation is as absent for the

[101] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.159.
[102] ibid, p.159.
[103] ibid, p.159.

prisoner Levi as it was to be for the liberating troops and the British public during the spring of 1945.

As the healthier prisoners begin to try and prepare for the camp's evacuation, the arbitrary state of Levi's survivorship is evident. He recognises that had it not been for his illness he too would have been consumed by the fear of the future that was now compelling the other prisoners to leave; 'It was not a question of reasoning; I would probably also have followed the instinct of the flock if I had not felt so weak; fear is supremely contagious.'[104] Both his illness and his long-term experience of the camp guide Levi in these last days before liberation. His illness leaves him few options. His greater self-awareness allows him to perceive of consequences that pass less experienced prisoners by; 'It is crazy of them to think of walking for even one hour. I tried to explain, but they looked at me without replying. Their eyes were those of terrified cattle.'[105] In the chaos of the last days of Auschwitz it is not the action of any liberating force that is saving Primo Levi's life. It is camp experience and scarlet fever. Levi describes that chaos as the Germans' grip on the camp began to wane; 'the healthy prisoners had ransacked the deposit of patients shoes and taken the best ones'.[106] Levi's close friend Alberto has decided to leave and comes to say goodbye. Only now does Levi allow himself a thought about how liberation might bring the loss of friends and comrades; 'We were inseparable. He was cheerful and confident, as were all those all were leaving. It was understandable, something great and new was about to happen; we could finally feel a force around us which was not of Germany.'[107] Just as quickly as the possibility of a new future is hinted at, it is taken away; 'All the healthy prisoners left during the night of 18th January 1945. They must have been about twenty thousand, coming from different camps. Almost in their entirety they vanished during the evacuation march; Alberto was among them.'[108] With the departure of the healthy prisoners Levi notes, 'The rhythm of the great machine of the Lager was extinguished.' As the remaining SS made lists of the prisoners on 18 January 1945, Levi records a sense of resignation and a conviction that death is closer than liberation for those left behind as he watches an SS man with

[104] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.160.
[105] ibid, p.160.
[106] ibid, p.160.
[107] ibid, p.161.
[108] ibid, p.161.

'tranquil fear'.[109] That strange tranquillity is not broken by the bombardment of the camp by the Russian guns; 'It was nothing new; I climbed down to the ground, put my bare feet into my shoes and waited.' Levi finally leaves a space in the written narrative and then a simple, single sentence on what amounted to his liberation; 'The Germans were no longer there; the towers were empty.'[110]

Levi's account of the final days of his captivity in Auschwitz presents a picture of liberation as an ambiguous and transitory state for both the camps themselves and for their prisoners. The changing status of the camps and of the identity of their prisoners during the last months of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 played a crucial role in the reactions of the liberating nations. Levi's account is also evidence of the challenges that liberation brought to the prisoners. Many survivors record a continued fear of their Nazi captors in their later written accounts of the liberation experience. Many feared that their Nazi guards' would react to the advancing Allied troops by murdering the remaining prisoners. Ruth Foster shared that fear; 'What were they going to do with us? Burn us? Shoot us?'[111] Foster's testimony now forms part of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition. Ephraim Poremba was liberated by the Americans at Allach and comments in testimony given to Yad Vashem in the 1960's; 'The fear came back, we were afraid of what they would do with us. If the Americans or the English came too close, they might wipe us out with the weapons they had.'[112] Eva Braun was liberated by the Americans at Salzwedel and says of the day of liberation, 'We heard it. We were frightened. Maybe the Germans had recaptured something and they were coming back. But then somebody screamed and said these were Americans!'[113] Survivor Sim Kessel illustrates the way in which the fear that the Germans might retain control or destroy the camp and its inhabitants prior to the Allies' arrival altered his perspective of liberation day; 'The fear that our guards might return and punish us somewhat poisoned our jubilation.'[114] Fear of their captors often gave way to utter disbelief at the arrival of their liberators and many record the actual moment of liberation in very short, simple sentences that suggest

[109] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, p.163.
[110] ibid, p.163.
[111] Ruth Foster, Testimony included in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition.
[112] Included in Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation: Testimonies from 1945, (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995), p.50.
[113] Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation, p.50.
[114] Sim Kessel, Hanged at Auschwitz, (Coronet, London, 1975), p.174.

that a certain disbelief at the reality of liberation remained with them into their survivorship. Often the concentration and extermination camp prisoners had more faith in the actions of their captors than in the arrival of their liberators. Indeed Primo Levi concludes, 'Not one Jew truly believed that he would still be alive the next day.'[115] Survivor S.B. Unsdorfer is reserved in his account of the moment of liberation at Buchenwald; 'and so the hour had come after all those terrible years'.[116] Unsdorfer's account of the arrival of the American liberators does, however, suggest his struggle to believe his own eyes; 'my ears picked up an unrecognisable rumble. Directing my eyes towards the main gate, I saw through thick clouds of dust and sand, a column of tanks rolling past the entrance. Their colour was light brown, and a white star was painted on their sides. The Americans!'[117]

Many survivors write of their disbelief that liberation had actually occurred and there is a sense of otherworldliness about their accounts of that day. Liberation brought the end to the awful but familiar routines of camp life and heralded a new and unsure period in their experience. Unsdorfer may, like many survivors who went on to become writers, have struggled with the search for adequate language to record the true impact of the realisation that liberation had actually arrived. Sim Kessel remembers how the American soldier who stood before him in Mauthausen seemed like 'an apparition'[118] and Elie Wiesel, America's 'emblematic survivor' records the 'magical appearance of the first American units' at Buchenwald.[119] The struggle for understanding continued for many survivors well beyond the days of their liberation. To account for the difficult transition posed by liberation is not however to ignore the still significant expressions of joy and relief at the prospect of some kind of freedom that pervade many survivor testimony images of liberation. Yehusua Buchler tells of 'incredible rejoicing' as he and his fellow captives were liberated from Eisenberg in Germany. Buchler had already escaped from a death march. Eva Braun comments, 'it was freedom. We were elated', whilst Ephraim Poremba remembers that, 'there was joy. A tremendous eruption of shouting! You could tell the difference between the shouts of joy and the shouts of fear'. Gizi Godalli was amongst the few liberated at

[115] Primo Levi in Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation, p.5.
[116] S.B.Unsdorfer, The Yellow Star, (Thomas Yoseloff, New York, 1961), p.192.
[117] ibid, p.192.
[118] Sim Kessel, Hanged at Auschwitz, p.174.
[119] Elie Wiesel, All Rivers Run to the Sea, (Alfred Knopf, New York, 1996), p.96 and Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, p.273.

Auschwitz Birkenau on 27 January 1945; 'We were free. We celebrated the end of the war for three days and three nights.' It is perhaps noteworthy that those celebrations are absent from Levi's record of this period at Auschwitz making clear the individual nature of the liberation experience for those that survived and importantly of the way in which it was remembered and recorded in testimony. Asher Barasi was freed from Theresienstadt; 'This was joy such as I had never seen before.'[120] In turn joy existed alongside the physical demands of continued survival and of a confrontation with your own weakness as Henry Wermuth suggested; 'Ein Amerikaner soldat...my insides erupted with uncontrollable convulsions. I felt my tear ducts involuntary release, shedding streams which I would not have believed they had.'[121]

Despite the presence of the liberators, survival remained a struggle and centred on the search for food. Food dominated the experience of many survivors in those early days after liberation. Victor Frankel has written that, 'The body has fewer inhibitions than the mind. It made good use of the new freedom from the first moment on. It began to eat ravenously.'[122] Food was also one of the first connections made between the liberated and their liberators as Allied soldiers attempted to ease the suffering around them with gifts of food, the consequences of which were not always positive. Chaim Rosenfeld who was liberated at Dachau wrote; 'They cooked soup in pots and then the terrible tragedy happened. People fell like flies. It was an unbelievable spectacle. People who had gone through that whole hell died just like that, unnecessarily.'[123] Elie Wiesel wrote of the overwhelming desire for food that consumed the prisoners at liberation; 'Our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. We thought only of that. Not of revenge, not of our families. Nothing but bread.'[124] Finally, Henry Wermuth recorded his moment of liberation simply; 'A prisoner shouts, "Ein Amerikaner soldat." I did not know how this news affected my comrades around me.'[125] Many survivors who have gone on to write testimonies record the impact of a shared realisation of the arrival of liberation amongst their fellow prisoners. For Wermuth however the moment seems to make the rest of the camp and the people in it disappear into the background. Wermuth was liberated at Mauthausen,

[120] In Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation, pp44 – 59.
[121] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply my Son, p.196.
[122] Victor Frankel, Man's Search for Meaning, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1946, 1962), p.89.
[123] In Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation, p.48.
[124] Elie Wiesel in Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust; The Liberation of the Camps, p.135.
[125] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply My Son, p.196.

the last camp Jon Bridgman explains, 'to be liberated by the Western powers, and as the liberation came on the same day as the surrender of Germany, it was little noticed in the press'.[126] Not for Mauthausen and its prisoners the film reels and international newspaper coverage that Belsen received in April 1945. Yet, as the responses to Belsen in Britain will illustrate that extensive coverage was no more a guarantee of a recognition by the wider world of the extent of the victims' suffering nor indeed of their true identities or of the part they had been forced to play in a Europe wide destruction process.

Paul Kemp sums up the state of Bergen Belsen in 1945 using the words of liberator Brigadier J. Melvin of the Eighth Corps Medical Unit of the British Army; 'Death rate 17,000 in March, thousands of corpses lying unburied. Inmates starving to death every day. Water and food finished. No light or sanitation. Hundreds dying.'[127] For Melvin and others Belsen signalled shock, horror and disgust. The testimonies of those who found themselves liberated in Belsen in the April of the liberation year contain the same ambiguities and questions evident in the testimony of others; the same fear of the consequences of the pending defeat of their captors, the same frustrations at the delayed arrival of their liberators and the same disturbing imbalance between joy and sorrow. Most importantly, they also provide a picture of the camp and the act of liberation that was to become the central point of connection between the British people, Britain and the construction of its *own* Holocaust.

Abel Hertzberg compiled his diary from the notes he made during his incarceration in Bergen Belsen. He was held at the camp from January 1944 until its liberation by the British in April 1945. Hertzberg experienced Belsen's descent into the chaos and misery that reigned in that April. Hertzberg was a Dutch Jewish lawyer and writer who had been imprisoned at Belsen when the camp was a 'Sternlager' or Star Camp where so called 'privileged Jews' were held by the Nazis for potential exchange. 70% of the captives held in Belsen during its Sternlager period were murdered. The change in Belsen's circumstances had brought it thousands more prisoners by April 1945. Many thousands of those did not live to see its liberation. Again, Hertzberg

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[126] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust; The Liberation of the Camps, p.119.
[127] Paul Kemp, 'The British Army and the Liberation of Bergen Belsen, April 1945' in Joanne Reilly et.al, Belsen in History and Memory, (Frank Cass, London, 1997), p.135.

shows us how liberation pervaded the everyday existence of Belsen's prisoners. Hertzberg also feared that the Allies were going to be too late. On 28 August 1944, some eight months before the British arrived, Hertzberg writes, 'we know that unless the Allies arrive very soon we will be lost – lost in sight of the harbour'.[128] For Hertzberg, the idea of liberation is the rule against which the scale of the ongoing suffering is measured. He is constantly bitterly frustrated at the continued distance that exists between himself and the British soldiers; 'this morning there were two more for whom the British would arrive too late'. Hertzberg gradually ceases to use the term 'Allied' to refer to the liberators and increasingly describes them as British. It is difficult to know whether Hertzberg became aware of the British identity of his advancing liberators when he was still captive in Belsen. His ability to identify his liberators in his testimony may have stemmed from his position as a survivor. He may not have known that the advancing troops in the spring of 1945 were British. That knowledge may only have come to him after his liberation. The very desire for liberation formed part of the daily routine of life in Belsen and meant that for Hertzberg, life in the camp became a destructive mixture of hope and despair. For example on 17 August 1944 he seems more positive; 'Providing that we are alive we will be able to live as free people and participate again in all those things that give meaning to life.'[129] However, on 7 September 1944 he writes, 'our future looks bleak. The mood is funereal. Eight days of the kind of work that now has to be done and again the British will arrive too late for a few more'.[130] On their arrival in Belsen the British liberators faced an expectation of themselves that they might always have struggled to live up to.

Hungarian Jewish doctor Gisela Perl was deported to Auschwitz Birkenau. She witnessed the core of Nazi brutality in her attempts to save and protect the young and or pregnant women of Auschwitz. Having survived that camp she found herself in Bergen Belsen in its final months, also awaiting its liberation and the British; 'we trembled with fear and expectation. We vacillitated between hope and despair'.[131] Perl suggests that the hope for liberation proved a unifying force amongst Belsen's

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[128] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams: A Diary from Bergen Belsen, (I.B.Tauris, London, 1997), p.21.
[129] ibid, p.100.
[130] ibid, p.71.
[131] Gisela Perl, I was a doctor in Auschwitz, (Ayer Company, Salem, 1992), p.152.

prisoners; 'day after day went by and I was waiting for the liberating armies who would open the doors of our camp and give us back our desperately hoped for freedom – at night when our jailers locked the doors on us we sat in the darkness and planned for the day of liberation'.[132] It is noteworthy that Perl should envisage the arrival of 'liberating armies' in Belsen. The phrase suggests the involvement of the Allies in some type of planned process of liberation or that the liberation of the camps represented a priority for them. The tone of much of Perl's writing suggests her disappointment in her discovery as a survivor that that had not been the case. Many of Perl's reflections on her liberation at Belsen may also be coloured by the fact that she was one of many of Belsen's eventual survivors who had already undergone the trauma of being removed from extermination centres in the east only to be reimprisoned in the German concentration camp. Perl had made the same journey from Auschwitz to Belsen, that her fellow survivor Anita Lasker Wallfisch describes as 'from hell to hell'.[133] Perl recalls the moment that from within Belsen she heard the news that Auschwitz had been liberated by the Russians; 'For two days I went around in a red haze of pain, despair and fury. Auschwitz has been liberated! I could be a free and happy being today had they permitted me to stay there![134] Lost opportunities for liberation are very much part of many of Belsen survivors' memories of that period. Much time was invested in conjuring images of the day of liberation. It rarely fulfilled such great expectations. Yet the hopes for the day and the projected image of the liberators were vital in the Belsen prisoners' attempts to stay sane. Hertzberg suggests an almost all consuming desire to will the liberators closer; 'I look at the sky. Are they not coming yet?'[135] He asks again, 'Will we make it? After six years of war! After all we have experienced, to stumble at the threshold!.' On 5 September 1944 Hertzberg writes, 'we are starting to live in a state of tension here. We are desperate for the liberation'.[136] Any attempt on our part to grasp the extent of Hertzberg's frustration as readers of his testimony is only made more difficult by our knowledge that the hoped for liberation remained more than seven months away when he made that note in his diary. The idea of liberation creates an unbalanced relationship between a complete conviction that it would become an experienced reality and a

[132] Gisela Perl, I was a doctor in Auschwitz, p.161.
[133] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, Chapter Seven, 'From Hell to Hell: Our Miraculous Escape to Belsen', pp.87 – 93.
[134] Gisela Perl, I was a doctor in Auschwitz, p.155.
[135] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams, p.106.
[136] ibid, p.65.

desperate sense that it could only ever come too late. In the days and months before the Allies arrived liberation became a watershed in the minds of Belsen prisoners and an event rehearsed over and over again. This 'liberation' was of course unaccompanied by the physical freedom that those days in 1945 would eventually bring for some. The day of liberation itself, if only in name, brought that physical freedom to the prisoners. It also to a certain degree removed the routines of camp existence that had made the prisoners' vision of liberation so necessary. The day of liberation then marked an ending and a beginning. The transition from the camp life created by the Nazis to that instigated by the British was difficult to make for those who had survived until then. Prisoners like Gisela Perl were forced to offset their dreamed of liberation against its reality; 'during the interminable months waiting for the day of liberation I had seen myself again and again leading my fellow sufferers to freedom. I had seen myself walking ahead of them, laughing, crying, singing songs of freedom, a human being going to meet other human beings'.[137] That image existed in stark contrast to the realities of liberation day in Bergen Belsen. Perl records her realisation of that fact, simply; 'This was not how I imagined it!'[138]

In October 1944 Anita Lasker Wallfisch was transported from Auschwitz to Bergen Belsen. She records in her testimony that she and her fellow prisoners had been unaware of their destination and instead were simply consumed with disbelief that 'we were going to leave Auschwitz by the Main Gate'.[139] In a testimony that is a combination of Wallfisch's memories and of the information she gathered about the Holocaust in the years afterwards, she records that, 'We had no idea where we were going. I know now, though did not know then, that the Russian front was approaching fast from the east.'[140] The style and character of her testimony is marked by her apparent need to provide the reader with information and detail beyond that which she herself can remember or experienced directly; 'it is only today, after reading a book about Belsen, that I am able to understand how it got the reputation of being a convalescent camp. I will give you a brief history of this infamous place.'[141] Of the four day journey to Belsen, Wallfisch remembers the extreme cold, but little else,

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[137] Gisela Perl, I was a doctor in Auschwitz, p.141.
[138] ibid, p.141.
[139] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.86.
[140] ibid, p.87.
[141] ibid, p.87.

'that I remember little about our trip in the cattle truck is again symptomatic of the necessity for some experiences to be pushed out of one's mind'.[142] On arrival at Belsen Wallfisch and her sister judge the state of the camp by the standards of the destruction process with which they have become familiar; 'Renate reminded me the other day that we noticed somebody with a Kapo armband bending over a soup vat and scraping it out. She had remarked drily: if a Kapo needs to do this, things must be bad.'[143] Again the complex nature of Wallfisch's testimony is evident as her own memories are interspersed and supported by those of her sister. The reader is frequently moved between the time of writing and Belsen in 1944/45 and must balance the voices of several witnesses and the information contained in the documents, letters, and photographs included in the published text. Wallfisch's note that her transport from Auschwitz contained some 3000 people makes clear the extent to which the transformation in Belsen's identity was underway by the autumn of 1944. Wallfisch is aware that her readers will already have an image of Belsen in their minds and it is an image grounded in the liberation year of 1945; 'the name Belsen conjures up pictures of heaps and heaps of unburied corpses and human skeletons moving among the corpses'.[144] As though writing against the impact and memory of those images, and crucially against their emphasis on the dead and dying, she tries to provide the reader with an alternative picture of the camp where the focus is on the living. In the sentences that follow the previous quotation, Wallfisch frequently uses the first person as though to return a degree of individuality to the suffering of Belsen that, she suggests, is absent from the liberation 'pictures of heaps and heaps of unburied corpses'. She writes, 'My courage has begun to desert me as I try to tell you what is was actually like **living** in this place' [my emphasis] and 'I am fully aware' and 'I shall attempt'.[145] The dominant images of Belsen's liberation not only left its victims and survivors nameless and faceless but also ensured Belsen's true identity and history went unknown and misrepresented for years. Wallfisch not only seems concerned to remind her readers that individual lives had been lived out in the camp, but also to present another picture of Belsen, to be true to the identity of the camp and again she must do so in the face of the all consuming images of its liberation by British troops; 'In those early days, Belsen looked different from the pictures we have

[142] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.89.
[143] ibid, p.89.
[144] ibid, p.91.
[145] ibid, p.91.

seen of it in films. There were no mountains of corpses littering the camp. There was nothing to do.'[146]

As for Hertzberg, the idea of liberation is focused on the actions of the perpetrators in Wallfisch's account and on the psychological challenges posed by any idea of actually reaching the end; 'We knew – I don't know how – that camps had been blown up before they could be liberated. It was not surprising. Who wants to be caught with millions of rotting corpses on display? So, in a way, we scarcely dared to hope. But it was hard to come to terms with the fact that we might still have to die before the nightmare came to an end.'[147] Wallfisch was so convinced that she would be killed before liberation that she recalls how the suggestion that the British may be close simply made her 'absolutely furious' as it risked the onset of false hope. Fellow Auschwitz survivor and Belsen prisoner Fania Fenelon was also fearful of the consequences of liberation; 'All morning the rumour had been going around that they were going to do away with us. But unlike the rumour about the liberation of the camp, this one rang true.'[148] Liberation day itself thus brings utter disbelief for Wallfisch; 'When I first heard the announcement through a loud hailer and saw the first British tank I flatly refused to believe my eyes.'[149] Gisela Perl explains the difficulty Belsen survivors faced in trying to make the leap from the liberation of their imaginations to the reality; 'Something was happening beyond the barbed wire fences, something of great importance of which we not told. And yet rumours began to travel from mouth to mouth, wonderful encouraging rumours. The Allies are coming! The Liberators are coming!'[150] Fania Fenelon found the eventual arrival of the British just as difficult to comprehend; 'From the remotest distance a man was speaking; what was he saying? No one was answering him. That was odd. What was going on? Strange words reached my ears – it was a language I knew. It was English!'[151] She recalls how the moment had been so long awaited and yet seemed so difficult to take in; 'we had lived for this moment; we'd imagined it hundreds of times, polished and repolished it, added a thousand details of sated vengeance, and now seeing a procession crossing the camp, we failed to understand that what we had waited for for

[146] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.91.
[147] ibid, p.92.
[148] Fania Fenelon, Playing for Time, (Syracuse University Press, 1976, 1977), p.5.
[149] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.94.
[150] Gisela Perl, I was a doctor in Auschwitz, p.172.
[151] Fania Fenelon, Playing for Time, p.6.

so long had arrived'.[152] Fenelon is not alone in hoping for a connection between liberation and revenge and often it seems much of Belsen survivors' disillusionment with the day of liberation itself can be traced to the fact that such opportunities for revenge failed to materialise. Finally, and echoing the sudden extinguishing of Auschwitz recorded by Primo Levi, Wallfisch's sister comments of Belsen, 'The Germans had evaporated.'[153]

Anita Lasker Wallfisch, despite devoting a considerable section of her testimony to liberation still comments, 'I would like to be able to describe how it felt to be liberated. That would be a daunting task even for a professional writer.'[154] Belsen survivors record the disturbing mix of emotions and activities prompted by the arrival of the British troops. Fania Fenelon credits the arrival of the British with the restoration of her sense of identity as a human being; 'A great hurrah burst forth and swept along like a breaker, carrying all before it. They had become men and women again.'[155] She describes the responses of those prisoners around her; 'madness was unleashed around me. They were dancing, lifting their thin legs as high as they could. Some threw themselves down and kissed the ground, rolling in the filth, laughing and crying'.[156] Gisela Perl suggests a universal sense of joy in Belsen at the arrival of the British and records the occasion with dramatic, even theatrical imagery; 'Suddenly I heard trumpets and immediately afterwards a tremendous shout of joy coming from thousands of throats shook the entire camp. The British have come! The Liberators have come! We are free...free!'[157] Relief and joy were often transitory in Belsen and gave way to the demands of physical survival and to a confrontation with what Wallfisch has described as 'the space in front of us'.[158] Despite acknowledging feelings of 'relief, incredulity and gratitude' she comments, 'We were completely burnt out.'[159] Hedi Fried, an Auschwitz survivor, liberated at Belsen remembers that, 'At that moment I felt only indescribable weariness. I walked back to the bed and wanted only to sleep.'[160] For Auschwitz survivor and Belsen prisoner Esther

[152] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.256.
[153] ibid, p.95.
[154] ibid, p.96.
[155] Fania Fenelon, Playing for Time, p.7.
[156] ibid, p.7.
[157] Gisela Perl, I was a doctor in Auschwitz, p.172.
[158] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.96
[159] ibid, p.96.
[160] Hedi Fried, Fragments of a life; The Road to Auschwitz, (Robert Hale, London, 1990), p.162.

Brunstein it is the presence of food that makes liberation real; 'I was too numb and confused to make sense of what they were saying. However, on seeing four chunks of black bread and four cans of Nestle condensed milk on my bunk it dawned on me that the longed for moment had come and we were free at last.'[161] The healthier prisoners in camps like Belsen tried to search the surrounding areas for food. Their attempts often resulted in violent encounters with other desperate prisoners. Yitzak Friedrich records how, 'we broke in, took margarine, butter; we tied our pants at the bottom, we filled up and got out of there as fast as we could. Finally inmates who were stronger than us caught us on the way. They beat us and took all that we had stolen, we were left with nothing again'.[162] Food had always been at the centre of the prisoners' vision of what liberation day would bring. Its impact in liberated camps like Belsen made clear how far the reality would only rarely live up to expectations. Wallfisch describes how food became the first point of contact between Belsen's prisoners and its liberators and the often terrible consequences of that first encounter; 'in their desire to help us as much as possible, they produced lots of food. That proved to be another serious mistake. Nobody was used to eating, certainly not tins of meat, and many people died'.[163]

Wallfisch says of the British troops she describes as 'like Gods to us' that 'they were totally shattered by what they saw'. [164] She reminds her readers, 'You must realise that we and our liberators saw the camp with different eyes.'[165] Indeed liberator Derrick Sington of the British army could only find a point of comparison in the animal world for what he what he was confronted with in Bergen Belsen. In his account of that spring in Belsen, he describes the prisoners he saw as a 'strange simian throng' and as 'prancing like zebras, these creatures in broad striped garments'. His only point of comparison for the smell of Belsen is that of 'a monkey house'.[166] Leslie Hardman, Jewish chaplain to the British army in Belsen describes his encounter with the prisoners 'as though they had emerged from the ground itself, or had floated out from the retreating shadows of dark corners, a number of wraithlike

[161] Esther Brunstein in Joanne Reilly et.al, Belsen in History and Memory, p.214.
[162] Included in Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation, p.48.
[163] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.98.
[164] ibid, p.98.
[165] ibid, p.96.
[166] Derrick Sington, Belsen Uncovered, (Duckworth, London, 1946), p.16.

creatures came tottering towards us'.[167] Hardman's colleague Isaac Levy simply writes of the 'haggard and starved bodies, bulging eyes, pitifully appealing for help'.[168] As *Chapter Three* will reveal, in the spring of 1945 the British press brought the words of the liberating soldiers and the images of the liberated camps to the British people – the voices of the survivors absent, this was a vision of liberation constructed not only from 'the other side of the fence' but one experienced, remembered and represented 'with different eyes'.[169]

[167] Leslie Hardman, The Survivors, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1958), p.14.
[168] Isaac Levy, Witness to Evil, (Peter Halban, London, 1995), p.10.
[169] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.97.

Chapter Three

'The Special Moment in the War'
Britain, 1945 and the Liberation of the Camps

In July 2006 the BBC recorded the outbreak of violence between Hezbollah forces and the Israeli army in Lebanon. Their reporting rapidly turned to an increasingly emotional focus on the evacuation of British citizens from the region. A 'flotilla of ships', spearheaded by the Royal Navy, it was reported, would 'rescue' Britons in 'one of the largest evacuations since Dunkirk'. If historian Mark Connelly's thesis is accurate, then those few words and the very sight of the Royal Navy, 'carry great meaning' and 'touch a chord' for the corporation's British audience.[1] Why? 1945 marked the end of the war that is still the touchstone of British national identity. In Britain that war 'is placed within the context of the governing principles of the supposed national story'.[2] It is a war whose language, imagery, memories and myths are returned to in times of crisis and defeat and in moments of British achievement and success. That process can occur even when the crisis is actually being faced by someone else (in this case, the Israeli and Lebanese people) and, as the BBC's comparisons suggest, is often immune to any concern with historical accuracy: the evacuation at Dunkirk was of British soldiers on active service and not of civilians who were advised or who were volunteering to temporarily leave their homes. However, the status of the Second World War in British society, both whilst the conflict was ongoing and today, has led Connelly to contend that 'the British people carry a peculiar and particular history and memory of the Second World War with them'.[3] That memory requires a re-assessment of the 'accuracy' of the BBC's comparison. The statement may not 'accurately' represent the reality of the Second World War or indeed of the events in Lebanon. What it does accurately reveal is the nature of Britain's relationship with the Second World War. The historical details of 1940 are secondary to the need to evoke the 'spirit' of 1940, perhaps the most significant year in 'the myth of the war, which is in itself an extension of the

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[1] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Pearson Longman, London, 2004), p.14.
[2] ibid, p.14.
[3] ibid, p.14.

definition of national character'.[4] In referring to Dunkirk, one of the central images of British wartime memory, the 2006 BBC report blurred the boundaries between the British soldier or sailor and the civilian Britons at home and abroad. It also blurred the time between 'then' and now. The present day evacuees were described as 'coming home' despite the fact that the majority had chosen to base their lives in the Middle East for many years. The BBC seemed to reprise its perceived wartime role as the voice of authority and of reassurance, keen to provide viewers (no longer simply just listeners) with images of Royal Navy personnel and of emotional reunions at British ports. The media, in almost all forms, is central to the enduring omnipresence of the Second World War in British society. In the face of a disturbing conflict whose origins many in Britain arguably still find difficult to grasp, the war represented the familiar and all British people were unified in the present day evacuation experience, just has they had been during the 'People's War' – a war whose 'big facts', namely that Britain was right and that Britain won, are much easier to comprehend, or perhaps easier to rely on in times of uncertainty.[5] During the summer of 2006 the 'potent legacy' [6] of the Second World War has therefore been as present in British society as it was during the sixtieth anniversary year of 2005, explored in the *Introduction* to this study. Intimately connected through an increasingly complex (and often violent) relationship to sport, and especially to football in Britain, the war also lived on in the British public's rush to adorn their homes and cars with flags during the 2006 World Cup held in Germany.[7] Just as in the liberation year of 1945 when Selfridges had declared itself the owner of 'the best stocked flag department of all the West End stores', in Britain now as then, the 'flag sellers were doing a brisk trade among the crowds'.[8] Drawing on another familiar part of British life – the queue – many a football fan in Britain in 2006 might have felt themselves connected through a 'public

[4] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! p.2.

[5] Mark Connelly draws on the arguments of Malcolm Smith who identifies popular culture's interest in the 'big facts' of an event as opposed to the historian's concern with the 'little ones', p.6. See Malcolm Smith, Britain and 1940, (Routledge, London, 2000). Whilst the idea that most Britons can identify those 'big facts' regarding the war is persuasive, the perceived distinction between the interests of popular culture and those of the historian is unconvincing and does not account for the historian OF popular culture despite Connelly's contention that his own work details the popular myth of the Second World War.

[6] Juliet Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939 – 45, (Headline, London, 2004), p.590.

[7] The fact that in 2006 the flags were no longer a mixture of Union flags and St. George crosses as they had been in 1945 but were now predominantly the latter, Connelly would argue, was not just a result of the fact that the football team was English, rather than British. The flags may also represent an increasingly particular and exclusivist definition of Englishness that in the case of football hooliganism is often expressed through violence.

[8] Juliet Gardiner, Wartime Britain p.566.

and shared'[9] wartime memory to the 'spirit' of a London woman marking the end of the war in 1945 who had thought to herself, 'it'll be a change to join a flag queue'.[10] The Second World War provides and sustains what Dan Stone might identify as 'culturally familiar' narratives in British responses to domestic and international situations, but what role does that war play in the creation of Britain's *own* version of the Holocaust, in Britain's relationship with the destruction of European Jewry? [11]

In May 1945 BBC correspondent Richard Dimbleby flew home from Germany to London. Flying over the capital, and perhaps reminded of Churchill's 'bright gleam' of victory after the military successes at El Alamein, Dimbleby looked down on 'one of those sights that goes straight to your heart – a thousand tiny gleaming roof tops of a thousand brave and simple people'.[12] Six years of war were over. As Juliet Gardiner's evocative Wartime Britain 1939 – 45 proves, the British people met the coming of peace with the same multi layered and individual responses that had shaped their relationship with the war throughout the conflict.[13] Quiet relief, jubilant celebrations, sorrow at remembered losses, joyful reunions and nagging doubts about the future were all part of British reaction to the news of spring 1945. VE Day had simply left Richard Dimbleby exhausted and reflective; 'When I look back tonight on the horrors and the misery and the cruelty and the death that I have seen in the last six years, of the unforgettable experiences I've had and how much older and tired they've made me, I just want to go and sit in a corner and thank God it's all ending.'[14] Constructions of British identity and the myths and memories of the Second World War are inextricably linked. That connection was cemented in 1945. Britain's source of 'cognitive control' over the destruction of European Jewry both whilst it was ongoing and today is based in an attempt to draw that process within a narrative of national identity. The Second World War is central to that narrative. The liberation of the Nazi concentration camps shared the year of 1945 with the end of the war. To

[9] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! p.5.
[10] Juliet Gardiner, Wartime, p.567.
[11] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence: Forging A Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain 1945-6', in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), p.13.
[12] In Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1975), p.200. Churchill made his speech at the Mansion House to mark the success of the Eighth Army at the second battle of El Alamein. He said; 'We have victory – a remarkable and definite victory. The bright gleam has caught the helmets of our soldiers, and warmed and cheered all our hearts.' See Charles Eade, (ed), War Speeches of Winston Churchill, (Volume 2, Cassell, London, 1951), p.342.
[13] Juliet Gardiner, Wartime See Chapter 24 – 'We May Allow Ourselves A Brief Period of Rejoicing.'
[14] In Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby, p.201.

understand those British responses to the images of the liberated camps explored below, it is both necessary to account for the relationship between the 1939 – 45 conflict and British identity and to piece together the climate that connection created in British society in the liberation year of 1945. Richard Dimbleby's description of the British people and his romantic vision of a London at peace in 1945 cannot be fully understood without the knowledge that his plane had been bringing him home from the liberated Bergen Belsen. In turn his response to that camp and to its victims and survivors cannot be isolated from his understanding of British identity. The formation of Britain's own Holocaust and its representation in Britain today cannot be disconnected from the dominance of the British wartime narrative. The case studies of British responses to liberation included in this chapter often differ in their style and/or in their conclusions, but they all were created in the climate of 1945 or its immediate aftermath. All represent a British attempt to engage with and to bring under cognitive control the sights and sounds of the liberated camps. They also prove how the shared space between the events of liberation and the end of the war ensured that notions of Britishness and of British identity remained the binding factor at this stage of the nation's relationship with the destruction of Europe's Jews.

Tony Kushner comments, 'The nature of the images of concentration camps in spring 1945 was unprecedented and it is therefore hard to exaggerate the contemporary impact.'[15] The British people were shocked and disgusted by the sights and sounds of the liberated German concentration camps. The British press played a key role throughout 1945 in forming influential and lasting images of the events of liberation and of the identities of the victims and survivors. Fifteen days after British troops liberated Bergen Belsen, a debate, entitled 'Buchenwald Camp' was held in the House of Lords. The concentration camp at Buchenwald had been liberated by American troops on 11 April, just days before the British arrived at Belsen on 15 April. Images of the liberated Buchenwald now make up a significant part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's section on the liberation of the camps. Initially Buchenwald commanded much of the British public's attention. The camp's name had become familiar to the British people before the outbreak of the war. A British government White Paper published in the first weeks of war in October 1939 had

[15] Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business': History, Memory and Heritage, 1945 to 2005', p.35.

included what Andrew Sharf has called 'the most shocking descriptions' of Nazi brutality in Buchenwald in the aftermath of the Kristallnacht pogrom of the previous year.[16] The details of the White Paper were widely reported in the British press. The legacy of British coverage of the concentration camps in Germany throughout the 1930s would be evident in much of the response to the liberations of 1945 - indeed, in 1945 one journalist reporting from Belsen would recall how; 'Dachau was described in the late thirties and we did not want to hear'.[17] The focus of the earlier reporting on Nazi activity in Germany subsequently limited any recognition of the wider scale of the destruction process and of the place in that process held by camps like Buchenwald and Belsen. On 16 April 1945 The Times referred to Buchenwald as a place 'of death and misery'.[18] On 21 April 1945 a British parliamentary delegation made a trip to the liberated Buchenwald; 'the delegation's report, published as a White Paper, gave a harrowing description of conditions in the camp'.[19] During the House of Lords debate on 1 May 1945, Lord Denham had commented; 'the whole civilised world is satisfied about the truth of the allegations regarding these camps and is shocked to the core as no series of nations has ever been shocked in the world's history. This has been mainly due to the articles in the Press which they have seen, to the gallant war correspondents, to the magnificent and truth telling pictures that have been taken'.[20] And yet 'the key factor in representations of Belsen in 1945 was that they were framed as atrocities, but atrocities that had to be accepted as genuine'.[21] Lord Denham's speech, in twice making reference to the 'truth', reflected the British Government's concern that the images of the liberated camps should be believed by the British people - people for whom the idea of atrocity and of propaganda engendered a cautious and a suspicious response. The emphasis on 'truth telling' was aimed at creating clear definitions of the liberator, the perpetrator and the victim. The individual identities of the latter were secondary to their role as proof of German crime. In 1945 past British doubts about the camps and the treatment of inmates within them were explained away as an example of the depth of British sensitivity and

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[16] Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule, (Oxford University Press, London, 1964), p.85.
[17] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen' in Cyril Connolly, (ed), The Golden Horizon, (Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1953), p.112.
[18] The Times, 16 April 1945.
[19] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939 - 1945, (Oxford University Press, London, 1988), p.344.
[20] Lord Denham, 'Buchenwald Camp', Hansard, House of Lords, (Volume 136, 1 May 1945).
[21] Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business', p.7.

as a defence of British 'honour' as in The Times following Belsen's liberation; 'There have always been some who, for the honour of human nature, have withheld complete belief from the reports, finding it easier to suppose that suffering has caused hallucination in the victims than to imagine a degradation of the soul that could descend so far below the animal level of cruelty.'[22] Such a definition of honour would almost certainly have fallen short of any understanding of the term amongst the members of the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror. Thus whilst 'the Jewishness of its victims was communicated within the confines of the liberated camp', the representation of Belsen to the British people in 1945 was not defined by any such particularity.[23] There was more than one 'Belsen' in the aftermath of its liberation; that which existed within the perimeter of the camp, experienced differently by survivor, liberator and war correspondent and that presented to and interpreted by the British people. Beyond the camp's boundaries the emphasis lay with the meaning of Belsen for the perpetrators and for the German people – often considered to be one of the same in 1945.

On 20 April 1945 The Times had remarked on the insistence of the American military command that the townspeople of Weimar should be made to visit the newly liberated Buchenwald; 'beyond all this there is a larger significance in the lesson that is now being taught to the citizens of Weimar and other German towns. It is the beginning of the re-education of Germany. Germans have not only to see with their own eyes but to understand in their hearts that the monument to these doctrines is Buchenwald and all its horrors'.[24] On the following day, V.H. Galbraith of the Institute of Historical Research wrote to the same newspaper; 'The Allies will forever stand at the bar of history for their treatment of the conquered Germany.'[25] Galbraith's letter was further evidence of the British need in 1945 for absolute proof of the Germans' actions; 'no trouble can be too great to establish the facts beyond all shadow of a doubt and to remove them from the realm of passion and feeling'.[26] Galbraith's concern that emotion should limit the search for the truth had led to him to suggest that a party of 'civilian scientists' should accompany the parliamentary delegations to Germany. In

[22] The Times, 20 April 1945.
[23] Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business', p.6.
[24] The Times, 20 April 1945.
[25] ibid, 21 April 1945.
[26] ibid, 21 April 1945.

the days after liberation, Britain and its allies had begun to carve out for themselves a new role as the moral teachers of a defeated Germany. The mindless destruction that had occurred in camps like Belsen and Buchenwald was now given a purpose as it became the tool by which the German people could be controlled and eventually rehabilitated by the Allies. The images of liberation provided the British Government with a clear justification for the war effort and for the 'rescue through victory' policy that had defined their response to the refugee crisis. Liberation also provided a means by which to justify their treatment of Germany in the future. On a wider level, press reports from 1945 illustrate the way in which liberation prompted an in depth debate about the nature of the German character amongst the British people. The focus was on the extent to which ordinary German people knew about what had been happening in the concentration camps. Discussion also included the types of punishment that might be appropriate for German citizens. It was vital that the Allies, 'bring home to the German people the enormity of their crimes and to open their eyes to the depths of depravity to which they have sunk'.[27] Few distinctions were drawn in the initial aftermath of Belsen's liberation between Nazis and the German people as a whole. On 27 April 1945, Margery Bryce, a relative of Lord Bryce who had completed the Bryce Report into German Atrocities during the First World War, wrote to The Times; 'It is surely obvious that no discrimination is possible between the German military, intellectual or Nazi mentality.'[28] The potential use of the liberation photographs of Belsen as an educational tool for a vanquished German public had occupied many letter writers in 1945. Lionel Wood of Thornton Heath had written to The Times; 'May I suggest that the revolting pictures of the Nazi guilt be reprinted in pamphlet form and distributed throughout Germany.'[29] Two days later Major General John Duncan had addressed a letter to the same newspaper that was published under the headline, 'Germany and the Camps – Making the Truth Known – Films for the Reich.' Major Duncan wrote; 'It is within the power of the Allies to make these loathsome sights known to a large section of the German youth; by compelling all German prisoners here and in America to view the films which have no doubt been taken of these sadistic cruelties perpetuated by their Nazi leaders.'[30] J. Stevens admitted his own scepticism regarding the earlier reports of the camps but recognised

[27] Lord Denham, 'Buchenwald Camp'.
[28] The Times, 27 April 1945.
[29] ibid, 21 April 1945.
[30] ibid, 23 April 1945.

the power of the liberation images; 'The revelation of the true ghastly facts can be made to discredit the Nazi system in the eyes of the Germans in a way that defeat by superior forces can never hope to do.'[31] Percy Pickney's letter followed the same theme; 'These films should be shown by order in every cinema left standing in every town in Germany and the citizens should be compelled to go and see them.'[32] Doubts over the extent of German remorse were by no means rare in British society in 1945. Mavis Tate had been a member of the parliamentary delegation to the camps; 'The Germans are defeated in war, but from the little I saw I am very certain that there are in no way repentant in spirit.'[33] Much of the reporting of the liberation period illustrated a tension between a reserved and yet rarely well-concealed doubt over the very possibility of reforming the German people and a desire to believe that they had been temporarily perverted by a dreadful aberration in their political system. The Times had battled with the question of German behaviour in an editorial days after Belsen's liberation and had seemed forced to conclude that Germans occupied a world beyond the normal boundaries of human behaviour; 'so far can moral perversion deliberately cultivated in an entire generation, and equipped with the apparatus of power in a sophisticated age, surpass in brutality the native lust to kill in the most primitive savages – not only has all pity been crushed out of them; their inward perversion has gone so far as to deprive them of the very sense of the dignity of man'.[34] The liberated camps were used once more, not as evidence of the suffering of the Nazis' victims, but as proof of the Germans' depravity; 'To look at the bundled corpses of Buchenwald is to know that that is true.'[35]

In much of the reporting throughout the spring of 1945 the Nazis' Jewish victims were given little more individuality or identity than that afforded to 'the bundled corpses'. Victims were mentioned in the notable attempts by many British newspapers to seek some kind of explanation for the scenes of liberation but often these reports once more centralised the Nazi perpetrators by focusing on the mechanisms of the destruction process. The Times had informed its readers that; 'detailed reports are not yet available at Supreme Headquarters from which any estimate can be made of the

[31] The Times, 23 April 1945.
[32] ibid, 23 April 1945.
[33] Mavis Tate, 'I can credit every horror', in Lest We Forget, (Daily Mail, 1945).
[34] The Times, 20 April 1945.
[35] ibid.

thousands of victims who have died of starvation, disease or worse, in such places as Buchenwald and Belsen'.[36] Four days earlier the paper had stated, 'here in these fetid hovels filled with broken and dying men, in these long vistas of graves, is the reality in which the worship of unbridled power issues in the end'.[37] The Daily Mail attempted to explain that 'some were sheer murder camps, used only for the reception of live men and women and for the production of dead bodies'.[38] The paper's comments illustrated an attempt to understand the role of particular camps, although there was little sense of the relationship between camps like Belsen and Auschwitz – itself yet to achieve the central position in the representation of the destruction process that it holds today. Whilst there were inaccuracies in the detail and the camp's victims remained unidentified, the Daily Mail was significant in its recognition of the scale of the destruction at the Polish extermination centre; 'Such a one was Auschwitz, where, it is reported, at least four million people were done to death in circumstances of peculiar horror.'[39] Despite suggesting that gas chambers were common to all camps, the paper was clear on the vast nature of the camp system; 'they are called camps, but they were really towns whose industry was the performance of the blackest iniquities which one human being could practice against another'.[40] The search for control over the facts that were seeping out of Germany during the spring of 1945 was based in an attempt to 'explain' and to find (often historical) comparisons for the consequences of Nazi activity. A search for a rational explanation for the antisemitic aspects of the Nazi regime had been a feature of British public and state response during the years before the Second World War. In 1945 the focus remained on the Nazis' practices, as in The Times on 19 April; 'prisoners died from starvation, torture, hangings and shootings'.[41] The Daily Mail published a special supplement to mark the liberation of the camps. In Lest We Forget, the camps' victims and survivors were described as 'shrunken, pathetic figures, shapeless forms, pitiful wrecks and as 'shadow men for whom all hope, love, ambition and emotion are past'.[42] Many survivors, especially perhaps those who went on to write their testimonies, might have considered the latter description to be an

[36] The Times, 24 April 1945.
[37] ibid, 20 April 1945.
[38] Lest We Forget.
[39] ibid.
[40] ibid.
[41] The Times, 19 April 1945.
[42] Lest We Forget.

accurate one. However Lest We Forget also drew on Christian imagery throughout its presentation of the liberation experience. The final photograph of the supplement showed unidentified Belsen survivors kneeling before a cross in prayer and was subtitled 'Giving thanks for deliverance'. Lest We Forget couched the actions of the Nazis in terms of a battle against Christian society; 'it sought to destroy Christian civilisation and to replace it by a dark and bloody paganism deriving directly from the savage tribes of ancient Germany'.[43] The specific nature of Jewish suffering was deflected, as was the centrality of the racial policy in Nazi theory and practice. The attempt however to draw the scenes of liberation into an unbroken historical narrative of German aggression was another example of a British search for cognitive control in the months of 1945. It served not only to confirm the specifically 'German' nature of the atrocity and to identify its 'willing executioners', but also provided a means by which to explain Nazism and the camps – horrible, shocking, but a link in a chain that was at least within the grasp of understanding.[44]

The physical appearance of the victims commanded much attention. Nevertheless, the frequent recourse to descriptions that were drawn from the animal world had the effect of dehumanising the victims and of creating an image of otherworldliness about the camps themselves. One correspondent reporting from Belsen had described the inside of one of the camp's huts; 'These animals were piled one on top of the other to the ceiling, sometimes two to a bunk' and concluded, 'the withered skin was sagging over the bones and all the normal features by which you know a human being had practically disappeared'.[45] To today's readers some descriptions of the victims may seem to suggest a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the concentration camp world. An attempt to understand the struggle for adequate language, comparison and control in 1945 might explain what now seem to be mistakes or misrepresentations. For example, General Dempsey, a senior medical officer with the British Army in Belsen wrote to The Times and commented that, 'There were very few plump people.'[46] One of the journalists allowed into Belsen later remembered that 'from the

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[43] Lest We Forget.
[44] The words of Lest We Forget here may have resonated with Daniel Goldhagen in his theory that the Holocaust represented an example and culmination of a specifically German form of antisemitism traceable throughout Germany's history. See Daniel Goldhagen, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, (Alfred Knopf, New York, 1996).
[45] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.107.
[46] The Times, 19 April 1945.

first Dempsey was very keen that we should see Belsen and write about it'.[47] The cumulative effect of reports that mentioned the prisoners' nakedness, the proximity of surviving women and children to piles of unburied corpses whilst largely accurate, further distanced the British people from any engagement with the camps' victims simply as people, let alone as Jews or other individuals. The British press were appalled by the lack of dignity, privacy and cleanliness afforded the prisoners; 'naked men and women tried to keep themselves clean with the dregs of coffee cups'[48] and a correspondent told the Daily Mail 'I saw men and women standing naked in the open, trying to get themselves clean with cupfuls of water from ponds and ditches.'[49] Often, just as would be the case in The Times article marking the sixtieth anniversary of Belsen's liberation in 2005, British newspapers pointed out to their readers the presence of prisoners of perceived prominent or notable status.[50] This represented a rare occasion when the concentration camp victims were actually named in the British press. On 16 April 1945 The Times had included a United States Army report that noted the presence in Buchenwald of the Lord Mayor of Prague, a Director of the National Library in Paris and the murder in the same camp of the daughter of the King of Italy.[51] The legacy of the reporting of the 1930s was again evident in the descriptions of the victims. Those descriptions illustrated a continued universalism with regard to the identities of the victims, traceable since the pre war days; a liberal universalism that meant that either Jews were absent completely from reports or that the specific nature of their treatment was not highlighted. Mavis Tate wrote of the parliamentary delegation's findings, 'at each of these camps we found four general classifications of prisoners; political prisoners, habitual criminals, conscientious and religious objectors and persons in prison for failure to work'.[52] Tate's classification created the impression that the concentration camps were established and run in the same manner as ordinary prisons. In using familiar language that would have clear and understandable meanings for the British people, meanings grounded in a British context, the extraordinary nature of the Nazi camp system was lost. The victims became 'prisoners' and prisoners that had committed some type of crime. Their

[47] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.104.
[48] The Times, 19 April 1945.
[49] Lest We Forget.
[50] See the *Introduction* to this study and Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain,' The Times, 16 April 2005.
[51] The Times, 16 April 1945.
[52] Mavis Tate in Lest We Forget.

imprisonment could then be explained by the commonly accepted definition of the terms 'crime' and 'prison.' Jews were not mentioned at all. When Jews were referred to, and when the commentator appeared to understand the nature of the destruction process, the reference was again couched in terms that suggested that Jews must still have committed a type of crime that required punishment; 'we found the entire programme constituted a systematic form of torture and death administered to intellectual, political leaders and all others, including the Jews, who would not embrace and support the Nazi philosophy and programme'.[53] Moreover, the description suggested a degree of choice and that a political or conscientious decision had been available to, or had been made by the Nazis' Jewish victims. The emphasis on the political aspect of the regime downplayed the centrality of the racial policy in Nazi behaviour, but it did allow for a possible context for the sights and sounds of liberation and for a much sought after explanation – an explanation that fit with Britain's role as a morally superior victor.

The representation of victims at the point of liberation made monsters of the German perpetrators and kept the British people focused on German behaviour. The British press were horrified by the revelation that many of the SS staff found in the liberated camps were women. Edwin Tetlow had witnessed Allied soldiers forcing female Nazi guards to remove corpses and reported for the Daily Mail that; 'the SS women, the eldest of whom was only 27, were unmoved by the grisliness of their task. One even smiled as she helped bundle the corpses into the pit'. He had compared the responses of the male and female guards; 'they stood the ordeal worse than the women. They cringed and shrank and a dread fear was in their eyes.'[54] Having seen German women during her visit to the camps as part of the parliamentary delegation, Mavis Tate had remained convinced that there could be no distinction drawn between a German citizen and a Nazi; 'What also shocked me was the faces of so many ordinary German housewives of Weimar; hard, hating, aggressive, truculent and evil. I have never seen anything approaching them until I returned home and saw the photographs of the women guards at Belsen camp. They were the same faces on different women.'[55] As evident in the words of liberator and actor Dirk Bogarde some fifty years later, the

[53] Mavis Tate in Lest We Forget.
[54] Edwin Tetlow in Lest We Forget.
[55] Mavis Tate in Lest We Forget.

image of Nazi women in the liberated camps was a powerful and an enduring one in British society.[56] Nazism, it seemed to the British press, could manifest itself not only in an individual's behaviour, but also in their physical appearance. The Daily Mail wrote of 'typical German brutes; sadistical, heavy featured Nazis; quite unashamed; ghouls'.[57] Often Nazis were simply described as 'devils' and the clear boundaries between demonic perpetrator and humane liberating force, so desired by the British Government, were cemented.

Whilst there was an undoubtedly negative and often hostile attitude towards Germans present in much of the British people's response to the images of liberation in 1945, the search for cognitive control left others with thoughts about the future of Germans and Germany that were less black and white. The 'amalgam of antipodes' that Tony Kushner identifies in British people's responses to the destruction process was still in evidence in 1945, even if that complicated response was essentially focused on the perpetrators and not on their Jewish victims.[58] There were those who attempted to distinguish, with relative success and with varying degrees of conviction, between the Nazis and the German people. George Murray wrote the introduction for the Daily Mail's Lest We Forget and described the supplement's purpose as 'neither to harrow the feelings nor to foment hatred against the German people. No good would come of either'.[59] Murray, like many in Britain, had grappled with the notion that the ordinary German people had been ignorant of the destruction process unfolding around them; 'It has been stated that the Germans were unaware of the worst villainies which were enacted in their midst. But they must have known. Such things cannot happen without news of them trickling through the country.' Murray recognised the atmosphere of fear created by the Nazi regime and attempted to suggest, perhaps against the grain of general attitudes towards Germans at the time, that 'the probable truth is that they (ordinary Germans) preferred not to know too much lest they too should be caught in the torture machine of the Gestapo'.[60] F. Siedler wrote to The Times in the same vein

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[56] See the *Introduction* to this study and Dirk Bogarde's memories of Belsen in Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell,' The Daily Telegraph, 26 November 1988, reproduced in the collection of Bogarde's articles and reviews for the paper, Dirk Bogarde, For the Time Being: Collected Journalism, (Viking, London, 1998), p.143.
[57] Lest We Forget.
[58] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p.31.
[59] Lest We Forget.
[60] ibid.

on 23 April 1945 and reminded readers that before 'we judge a good German from a bad German' it must be remembered that a number of liberated camp prisoners and of the dead had been Germans themselves.[61] The words of MP Stephen King Hall went further. His attempt to prick the conscience of the British state and to recall British attitudes to the destruction process in the years before the war that were already being subsumed by the force of the liberation year represented the minority; 'Many I hope will now realise that in 1937 and before, the facts about concentration camps at places like Dachau, where German Jews, Socialists and Communists were being tortured to death, were being published in Britain. It is well that my colleagues should go to the camps, but the verdicts of history will be that democracy sent its representatives seven years too late.'[62] As evident in *Chapter One* of this study, King Hall's mixed feelings about the revelations of liberation had been matched by the members of the National Committee for Rescue whose supporters, despite their commitment to looking forward, met 1945 with the same sense of 'too little, too late.'

On 28 April 1945 Doreen Agnew had written to The Times and had urged the British people to recognise the crucial differences that existed between a liberated concentration camp and the camps in which British prisoners of war had been held; 'I think it is most important that the general public in England should realise that the recently discovered camps at Buchenwald and Belsen were not POW camps but concentration camps for political prisoners and for members of 'inferior races;' they have nothing to do with the war, but everything to do with the Nazi idea of peace and civilisation based on the extermination of all opposition and of the races not fit to match the Herrenvolk.'[63] Agnew's comments suggest the strong influence of the wartime narrative evident in British responses in 1945. The reference to British prisoners of war illustrated the way in which the experiences of war and of British soldiers were providing many in Britain with a framework in which to measure and understand the images of the liberated concentration camps. As a result the unique elements of the Nazi concentration camp system were lost. An association between the incarceration of British prisoners of war and the prisoners of the concentration camps was often made in the British press in the first months after the liberation of

[61] The Times, 23 April 1945. His name suggests Siedler may have been of German or refugee origin himself.
[62] ibid, 21 April 1945.
[63] ibid, 28 April 1945.

Buchenwald and Belsen. For example, on 19 April 1945 The Times had carried a story headlined, 'Release From A Prison Camp. The Scenes Before Liberation. Some British Officers Removed.'[64] The story had not referred to the liberation of a concentration camp. The article detailed the release of British soldiers from a German prison camp. In 1945 the piece had been accompanied by a statement from General Dempsey in Belsen entitled, 'The Captives of Belsen. Internment Camp Horrors. British Officer's Statement.' Sixty years later the same partnership of prisoner of war camp and Belsen stories was repeated in the same newspaper. Common to both article headlines in 1945 had been the reference to British officers. In 1945 camps were described interchangeably as prison camps and internment camps – a phrase associated with the imprisonment of 'enemy aliens' in the minds of the British people. The proximity of reports regarding POWs to references to Belsen was combined with the use of familiar terminology to again bring Belsen and Buchenwald within the boundaries of the recognisable, the understandable. The resulting inaccuracies served to limit British people's grasp of the unique elements of the concentration camps. A focus on the suffering of British soldiers as captives, whilst natural in Britain throughout the war years, may also have distracted Britons in 1945 from the unique kind of suffering experienced in concentration camps and from the identity of the camps' victims. Accounts of Belsen's liberation were brought to the British people not only through the publication of photographs and the imagery of film reels, but also in the reports and reflections of British journalists.

British journalist Alan Moorehead wrote a remarkable response to the liberation of Bergen Belsen for the magazine Horizon. In compiling an anthology of the magazine's huge number of articles in 1953, editor Cyril Connolly described Horizon's wartime role as 'a rallying point where writers might clear their minds and pool their experiences'.[65] Born in Australia, but a lifelong citizen of Britain, Moorehead 'made his name as a renowned war correspondent and writer'.[66] In 1940 Moorehead was appointed as the Daily Express foreign correspondent and covered

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[64] The Times, 19 April 1945.
[65] Cyril Connolly, (ed), The Golden Horizon, p.ix.
[66] See Ann Moyal, Alan Moorehead: A Rediscovery, (National Library of Australia, Australia, 2005). Moyal introduced her new work in a short piece for the National Library's newsletter, NLA News, (Volume XV, Number 12, September 2005). Moyal notes how the return of Moorehead's papers to his native Australia has prompted a need in that country to recognise his achievement and his contribution to Australian history.

the North African military campaign. In 1945 'following his own grim slog through war-torn Europe',[67] he wrote and published Eclipse.[68] Moorehead's 1945 work, named after the Allied code word for the occupation of Germany, included his reflections on the lives and actions of the British and Allied liberating forces. Moorehead also recorded the conditions faced by the liberated themselves, including those at Bergen Belsen. Alan Moorehead had visited Belsen in the days after its liberation and his article was included in the section of Connolly's anthology dealing with the events of 1945 in Europe. His time spent with the Allied forces and in the occupied Germany may have shaped his account of the camp, giving him a perspective that would have differed significantly from that of journalists and writers who came out to Germany from Britain after the camp's liberation. Moorehead's writing illustrated the complex mixture of responses to both the Nazis' victims and to the German people evident across British society in the aftermath of Belsen's liberation. Moorehead, like many in Britain, was concerned to establish the extent to which ordinary German people had any knowledge of the camp at Belsen. Before visiting the camp, Moorehead had eaten lunch with a German farmer; 'I suggested to the others in my party that we should turn in there and eat lunch before – rather than after – we visited the camp.' Moorehead stated, 'We were interested to know from the farmer what he thought of Belsen.' The farmer had informed the British visitors that he 'knew something horrible was going on but I didn't ask about it lest I should find myself inside'.[69] Moorehead's practical concern with his stomach may appear to have been wholly inappropriate in light of his surroundings. Indeed throughout the report he made a number of what now read as startlingly simplistic statements that seem disconnected from the environment of the liberated concentration camp. For example, on the journalists' arrival at Belsen itself, a British soldier sprayed Moorehead with anti-louse powder as part of the British Army's attempt to bring the disease in the camp under control. Moorehead described the experience as 'rather pleasant'.[70] Such phrases did not signal a lack of engagement with the realities of Belsen on Moorehead's part – the article was shaped by a series of perceptive and probing questions both about the camp, the future of Germany and significantly about the possible reasons for Britain's focus on Belsen in the aftermath of its liberation. Indeed

[67] Ann Moyal, NLA News, (Volume XV, Number 12, September 2005).
[68] Alan Moorehead, Eclipse, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1945).
[69] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.103.
[70] ibid, p.104.

Moorehead's biographer has described his writing as 'descriptive' and 'participant'.[71] Moorehead's use of such surprising language considering the circumstances of the report's construction might be read in a variety of ways. Moorehead was a war writer, a journalist used to the company of soldiers, to scenes of destruction and to a writing style that required succinct comment. On a subtle level, the juxtaposition of such simple phrases and of such basic (arguably selfish) concerns with the horror of the rest of Moorehead's imagery might (perhaps deliberately on the part of the author) have served to emphasise the level of destruction at Belsen for a careful British reader; thus the phrases are a powerful journalistic and literary device aimed at illustrating how the very notion of the 'pleasant' is undermined by the contents of the article and its writer's location. However, Moorehead's asides and the forceful tone of his writing may still have also ensured that a degree of the familiar, of the understandable, filtered into his report from Belsen and therefore into his readers' reaction. The phrases may have drawn Belsen within reach of something measurable by normal, recognisable definitions of the practical concerns of hunger and by normal interpretations of the pleasant and conversely of the unpleasant.

Alan Moorehead, just like Richard Dimblebly and the journalists that followed them both in 2005, was fascinated by the activities and responses of the British soldiers at Belsen. Moorehead commented of the soldier who had sprayed him with disinfectant; 'Possibly as a form of immunisation from the grisly work he appeared to be in particularly jovial spirits.'[72] The writer himself seemed to be reassured by the positive outlook of the British soldiers and staff. A doctor told him; 'There's quite a different air about the place in the last two days. They seem more cheerful now.'[73] It is not absolutely clear from Moorehead's article whether the doctor had been referring to an improvement of spirits amongst British soldiers in the camp or amongst the camp's survivors. Moorehead was keen to record the attitude of the British soldiers to the SS prisoners they had taken in Belsen; 'As we approached the cells of the SS guards the sergeant's language became ferocious – the sergeant unbolted the first door and flung it back with a crack like thunder. He strode into the cell, jabbing a metal spike in front

[71] Ann Moyal, NLA News, (Volume XV, Number 12, September 2005).
[72] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.104.
[73] ibid, p.104.

of him. "Get up," he shouted. "Get up. Get up, you dirty bastards."[74] Moorehead was also taken to see the female guards at the camp and shared many of the same feelings recorded by British people in April 1945; 'They all got up and stood to attention in a semi circle round the room, and we looked at them. Thin ones, fat ones, scraggy ones and muscular ones; all of them ugly, and one or two of them distinctly cretinous.'[75] Once more there was the implication that Nazism was made manifest in the physical characteristics and intellectual capacity of the women. Perhaps, unlike many in Britain at the time, unlike Mavis Tate for example, Moorehead did not see an unquestionable natural connection between the German character and an adherence to Nazism. Despite the possibility that the meaning may have been lost in the fallout from his previous description of the female guards, Moorehead did note in the next sentence that, 'there was another woman in a second room with almost delicate features, but she had the same set staring look in her eyes. The atmosphere of the reformatory school and the prison was inescapable'.[76] Moorehead's inclusion of the word 'almost' in his description of the woman's eyes might suggest that he was not utterly convinced by his own attempt to imply that Nazism was not a product of nature but of nurture.

Throughout the report it was only the British soldiers' responses to the camp's Nazi staff that Moorehead included. There was no sense given of the soldiers' feelings towards the camps' victims or its survivors. In addition to Moorehead's own descriptions of Belsen's victims, the dead and the survivors had appeared in the report as the subjects of British activity in the camp or as the targets for German abuse. In keeping with the climate in which it was written, the essay was aimed primarily at exploring what Belsen told the rest of the world about the Germans; it was not an attempt to reinstate the identities of the camp's victims. In Belsen Moorehead had seen 'a large blackboard ruled off in squares with white lines'. The board contained a 'list of nationalities – Poles, Dutch, Russians and so on. Spaced along the top of the board was a list of religions and political faiths – Communist, Jew, Atheist'.[77] Moorehead had surmised that the majority of the camp's prisoners were Germans,

[74] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.105.
[75] ibid, p.105.
[76] ibid, p.105.
[77] ibid, p.105.

'after them Russians and Poles. A great many were Jews'.[78] Moorehead's conclusion was ultimately a guess because as he noted, in what was perhaps an example of veiled criticism of the British in Belsen, 'From the board one might have seen at a glance just how many prisoners were in the camp from each nation, and how they subdivided politically and religiously. However, most of the numbers appeared to have been rubbed off, and it was difficult to make out the totals exactly.'[79] The universalising effects of such lists that focused on nationality and that took long periods of time to compile was combined with the 'informal censorship and self-censorship' of information from Belsen in Britain in 1945. The combination limited recognition of Jewish experience in Belsen.[80] Moorehead's own descriptions of the camp were brutal; 'The litter of paper and rags and human offal grew thicker and the smell less and less bearable...it was not always possible to distinguish men from women and indeed to determine whether or not they were human at all.'[81] He observed that 'there was a curious pearly colour about the piled up bodies and they were small like the bodies of children...having no stomach for this sort of thing I was only able to look for a second or two'.[82] The British soldiers accompanying Moorehead had insisted that he should visit both the women's and the men's huts at Belsen, the latter he described as 'more rancid' than the former.[83] As he had walked away from the huts, Moorehead noted that those prisoners able to walk themselves were motivated by 'some instinct' that 'drew people away from the charnel houses and up and out towards the entrance and the ordinary sane normal world outside'.[84] The otherworldliness of Moorehead's Belsen was reinforced by his subsequent reference; 'It was all like a journey down to some Dantesque pit, unreal, leprous and frightening.'[85] Jo Reilly has made reference to the recurring use of this literary reference with regard particularly to Belsen and its liberation.[86] Moorehead's lists of opposing adjectives divided the line for his readers between the two worlds inside and outside of Belsen. In many of the initial responses to Belsen journalists and writers

[78] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.105.
[79] ibid, p.105.
[80] Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business', p. 6.
[81] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.106.
[82] ibid, p.107.
[83] ibid, p.108.
[84] ibid, p.108.
[85] ibid, p.108.
[86] See for example, Joanne Reilly, Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, (Routledge, London, 1998).

would often describe a kind of underworld or a process of coming back into the light again on leaving the camp, just as Moorehead himself did. For example, Richard Dimbleby's famous report from the camp that is explored below was entitled The Cesspit Beneath.

The final section of Moorehead's report might be said to represent one individual's search for cognitive control as he dealt with what he called 'a frantic desire to ask: 'Why? Why? Why? Why had it happened?'[87] Moorehead's immediate reply to his own question was to move beyond Belsen's perimeter and to place the camp and the process that created it within a universal and continuing narrative of human behaviour; 'With all one's soul one felt: "This is not war. Nor is it anything to do with here and now, with this one place at this one moment. This is timeless and the whole world and all mankind is involved in it. This touches me and I am responsible."[88] Moorehead is notable in the 1945 climate for his attempt to distinguish blame from responsibility and to look beyond the behaviour of the Germans to the implications of Belsen for everyone and for the individual. It is not clear whether Moorehead's article was compiled within the liberated Belsen or whether a return to Britain and the publication of Eclipse in 1945 afforded him a greater period of time for reflection on the implications and meaning of the camp. His work has the powerful combination of the war correspondent's urgency and newness and a reflexive thoughtfulness that suggests a longer-term engagement with the camp and its effect upon him. In Moorehead's conclusion the same British universalising process that left Jewish victims and survivors largely unidentified also distanced Belsen from its own surroundings and from the unique destruction process of which it had been part. That distancing allowed for an explanation for Belsen – but one that did not and could not account for the camp's unprecedented status. The search for an explanation, for context and for a point of comparison effected Moorehead in the same way it had many Britons' in their response to the camp's liberation; 'Was it sadism? No, on the whole, not. Or, if it was sadism, then it was sadism of a very indirect and unusual kind.'[89] Dismissing sadism and turning to economics for a possible answer, he had continued to search, 'Can one imagine anything more inefficient than letting all this

[87] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.108.
[88] ibid, p.108.
[89] ibid, p.108.

valuable labour go to rot?'[90] And finally he wondered whether the Germans might have simply lost their grip on basic common sense; 'The Germans too had a normal fear of disease spreading among themselves. And yet they let thousands of bodies lie on the ground.'[91] Significantly, Moorehead did recognise the unique nature of suffering in Belsen in the last days before its liberation; 'It was not torture which had killed the prisoners. It was neglect.' He explained this neglect as a result of the 'sheer indifference of the Nazis'.[92] He continued; 'One began to see that the most terrible thing on earth is not positive destruction nor the perverse desire to hurt and destroy. The worst thing that can happen to you is for the master to say: "I do not care about you anymore. I am indifferent."'[93] Whilst Moorehead's words might have been accurate with regard to the attitude of the SS at Belsen in its final months and days, in suggesting indifference and a lack of care as the Nazis' motivating force, his report minimised the organised, sustained and dominant nature of the 'Final Solution' – perhaps because, like so many reports in 1945, it did not start from the perspective that Jews had been the Nazis' primary victims. The Nazis were not indifferent to Jews–their destruction was paramount. Neglect was *combined* with, not secondary to, 'positive destruction' and 'a perverse desire to hurt and destroy'. Moorehead explained the attitude of Belsen guards towards their victims; 'It was accepted that they should die. They were Russians. Russians die. Jews die. They were not even enemies. They were disease. Can you mourn or sympathise with the death throes of a germ?'[94] Moorehead was frustrated by the absence of a clear source of responsibility for Belsen and had left open to the British reader the possibility that responsibility went beyond a single, clearly defined perpetrator: 'Who then was responsible for Belsen and, for that matter, all the other camps? The SS guards? They say they were ordered. Kramer says he was in precisely the same position. And so presumably do all the other Kramers above him until you reach Himmler. What does Himmler say? Himmler says he is serving his Fuhrer.'[95] The German people, Moorehead argued, would, if confronted, have responded in the same manner and would have explained that they had had little choice in their actions or had known nothing of the camps. Echoing James Parkes' sense that 1945 might have been too soon to piece together the

[90] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.108.
[91] ibid, p.108.
[92] ibid, p.109.
[93] ibid, p.109.
[94] ibid, p.109.
[95] ibid, p.110.

whole of which Belsen was part, the journalist stated that he had presented this attitude to his readers, 'not because I accept or reject it, but because we are still too close to the scene to do much more than report personally and directly'.[96] Moorehead concluded his report by accepting that there was a hierarchy of responsibility for Belsen and that mankind as a whole was included within that. With the remaining prisoners freed from Belsen 'only the mental danger remains. The danger of indifference'.[97] This time Moorhead had been referring to the indifference of the rest of the world and the need to 'be vigilant to snap the long chains that lead to the future Belsen before they grow too strong'.[98] Most significantly, and hinting at the atmosphere created by the liberation of the camps in Britain in 1945, Moorehead suggested that his other reason for such an in depth search for an explanation for Belsen was because 'it seems such a pity to give way to the downright childishness of saying that all Germans are natural black-hearted fiends capable of murdering and torturing and starving people at the drop of a hat'.[99] His report represented a complicated response that operated on multiple, often contradictory levels – perpetrator-centric, but also suggesting a more universal (including British) degree of responsibility for the scenes at Belsen; hard hitting, often sensationalist journalistic descriptions and sensitive questioning; admiration for and veiled criticism of British procedures at the camp, and a recognition that many of the camp's prisoners were Jews alongside a dehumanising description of an other world of 'animals' and 'human offal'. Crucially Moorehead explained British interest in Belsen as a result of the conjunction between 'the special moment in the war' and the camp's liberation. That 'special moment' in the war had been Britain's own recognition of itself as a victorious nation in 1945 and 'since Germany was manifestly beaten, people wanted to have a justification for their fight, a proof that they were engaged against evil'.[100] The British Government had certainly felt that Belsen provided such 'proof.' Had Belsen's liberation not occurred at such a moment, had the liberation of the concentration camps not shared the year of 1945 with the conclusion of the Second World War then, Moorehead suggested, Britain would not have felt the 'shudder of horror' of April 1945.

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[96] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.111.
[97] ibid, p.112.
[98] ibid, p.112.
[99] ibid, p.111.
[100] ibid, p.112.

Whilst the events and sights of 1945 had prompted individuals such as Alan Moorehead to begin to ask questions regarding the wider implications of Belsen for mankind as a whole, there were those voices at home in Britain, that asked those very questions of Britain itself and of the British people. Often at the margins, those British voices nonetheless illustrate the diversity of British reactions to 1945 and prove how the question of Britishness, of the meaning of British or importantly, of English, identity would define the liberation year. For some in Britain, the liberation of the concentration camps did not only prompt them to chronicle the dreadful sights of those camps; rather, those sights caused some British individuals to look, not to Germany, but to Britain and to the actions and future of the liberating nation. Victor Gollancz was one such individual.

'It is the press I accuse, or the baser part of it: I accuse it of concealing facts, telling lies, magnifying trivialities, and deliberately appealing to the self interest and xenophobia which are latent in almost everyone.'[101] Victor Gollancz was appalled by the anti-German nature of much of the British press response to the liberation of the concentration camps and by the anti-German feeling present in British society in the months that followed VE Day. As in many British newspapers, Germany and the German people dominated much of his feverish letter writing and publications during 1945 and the following years. However the focus of his work was not a list of German atrocities and the suitable punishments. Rather Gollancz would attempt to make the British people recognise what he considered to be their responsibility as British men and women, as victors and as *human beings* towards the conquered Germany. In his work as part of the 'Save Europe Now' campaign that had occupied Eleanor Rathbone until her death in 1946, Gollancz tried to expose the scale of destruction in German towns and cities and the presence of disease and starvation. The 'Save Europe Now' campaign group counted amongst its supporters many former members of the National Committee for Rescue including the Bishop of Chichester and the Committee's secretary Eva Hubback. The group also published a Seven Point Programme just as the Committee had published its Twelve Point Plan for Rescue during the war. In 1946 Gollancz published a chapter from a book that he was in the

[101] Victor Gollancz, Leaving Them To Their Fate: The Ethics of Starvation, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1946), p.26.

process of completing. The book was published later as Our Threatened Values[102] and the chapter preceded it under the title Leaving Them To Their Fate: The Ethics of Starvation. The separate chapter detailed the desperate food situation that had developed in Germany since the victories of May 1945. Gollancz provided extensive information regarding the number of calories accessible to ordinary Germans and the logistics of the movement and distribution of food by the British forces in the occupied zones of Germany. Like News from Hitler's Europe before it, Gollancz's work in the aftermath of liberation included statistics regarding the state of Germany that needed little adornment. For example, in a series of articles about Germany published in a collection entitled In Darkest Germany Gollancz included a number of menus taken from British officers' messes in Germany as an example of the nutritional (and, as Gollancz saw it, humanitarian) gulf existing between those officers and the ordinary Germans. The menus included such luxuries as 'Rumpsteak', 'Crème Caramel', 'pears and ice cream' followed by 'coffee and biscuits'.[103] Amidst the detail regarding the food situation and against the tide of British response to the liberation year, Gollancz wrote with unreserved force; 'The plain fact is that in this last week of March, when after the long winter Spring is for the first time in the English air, we are starving the German people.'[104] Throughout his writing following the liberation of the camps, Gollancz's definition of Britishness and his conception of the English character was continually centralised. The contrast between the image of an English Spring and the statement on German starvation was deliberate and powerful. 'Openly and without disguise', Gollancz outlined what he believed to be the British attitude towards the Germans; 'If it is a choice between discomfort for another and suffering for a German, the German must suffer: if between suffering for another and death for a German, the German must die.'[105] During his attempts to draw the British people's attention to the destruction of European Jewry Gollancz had remained specifically focused on the role of the British nation. He remained so as he turned his attention towards Britain's response to 1945; 'Others, including ourselves (and I am mainly thinking of ourselves) are to keep or be

[102] Victor Gollancz, Our Threatened Values, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1946).
[103] Victor Gollancz, 'Some Menus at Officers' Messes', in Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1947), p.108.
[104] Victor Gollancz, Leaving Them To Their Fate, p.1.
[105] ibid, p.1.

given comforts while Germans lack the bare necessities of existence.'[106] Britain's status as victors created, according to Gollancz, a special responsibility; 'By our own command, by the might of bombers that would otherwise have destroyed them to the last man, they were to be, in complete helplessness, at the mercy of their victors. I am not discussing the wisdom or morality or expediency or what you will of unconditional surrender: I am stating a fact. If that does not impose a special obligation on a nation that calls itself civilised, what does?'[107] Gollancz believed that the British public were the true audience for any direct appeal on behalf of their recent enemy and as he had done in the years before 1945, he separated them from the attitudes of those in power in Britain; 'I am not accusing the public...for they simply have not been allowed to know what the position actually is: they have been so deafened by talk about their personal inconveniences...few of them could have any effective realisation of what life was meaning for so many.'[108] The British Government's focus on German atrocity and what Gollancz regarded as its subsequent attempt to ignore the suffering in the defeated Germany was the major target of his anger and frustration; 'I accuse the Government...it has made us all its accomplices in a national policy which is quite unworthy of what Mr. Churchill called, "our customs and our nature."'[109] Once more it was British honour that Gollancz believed was at risk as a result of the Government's lack of direction. Britain, Gollancz argued, must act as a result of and in defence of its own values and national identity regardless of the actions of other countries; 'Quite irrespective of what other countries may or may not do, we should make the very maximum contribution in our power to the relief of suffering wherever it may occur.' He continued, 'Have we in fact done everything possible? Are we doing it now?'[110] Without British action to aid the starving Germany during the months that followed May 1945 Gollancz predicted the moral decline of the British nation; 'To "leave them to their fate" would rot our moral fibre no whit less surely than Hitler's bombers destroyed our cities and our friends.'[111] Gollancz was outraged by the British Government's intention to import additional food for British people to mark Christmas 1946. In response he addressed a letter from Germany on 'Turkeys and

[106] Victor Gollancz, Leaving Them To Their Fate, p.1.
[107] ibid, p.32.
[108] ibid, p.26.
[109] ibid, p.26.
[110] ibid, p.25.
[111] ibid, p.42.

Starvation' to the News Chronicle in November 1946. He reminded the British Government that the survivors of Belsen were now receiving a larger ration of calories than the people of Dusseldorf; 'the old, the feeble, the lonely, the very poor, the hardest working and the over conscientious have been living these last days on anything from 400 to 1000 calories. Four hundred – and I have been in many homes where this has been the daily ration – is half the Belsen figure'.[112] Gollancz's use of the Belsen example may also illustrate the extent to which the camp had already become the benchmark and point of comparison for all extreme suffering, regardless of context, in Britain even by 1946. Gollancz was aware that his views would be met with scepticism and, in some quarters of British society, outright hostility. He knew that he would be accused of minimising and of forgetting British suffering during the war. He admitted that 'we have been charged with preferring enemies to friends' and that as a result some had questioned his grip on reality, accusing him and those who supported him of 'behaving like irresponsible featherheads'.[113] In an article for The New Statesman whose title 'The Larger and the Smaller Lunacy' illustrated Gollancz's total unwillingness to sweeten the pill of his criticism of British action in Germany, he lamented the British decision to destroy the remaining factories at the port of Hamburg. He had anticipated the response to his stance; 'I shall be asked, I suppose, whether I forget the horrible engines of war that Bloehm and Voss produced. No, I don't forget them: I did my miserable best to warn people about them long before 1939....but I say that if there is one absolutely certain way of making a repetition of the last few years inevitable, it is to acquiesce in this godless destruction, and to drive a whole people, with whom somehow we have to live, into hatred and despair.'[114] Gollancz went further. In a statement that would not only have caused a sharp intake of breath on the part of many British people then, but also stands in continued isolation from the constructed memory of Belsen and its perpetrators in Britain now, he wrote, 'I am sorry for them: I am sorry for every man, woman or child who is in pain and distress, including Joyce and Amery before their execution and the man Kramer of Belsen whose face was pilloried in almost every newspaper for the baser public to make a mock of. Indeed I am sorriest of all for people like Kramer,

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[112] Victor Gollancz, 'Turkeys and Starvation,' News Chronicle, 8 November 1946. Reproduced in Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.29.
[113] Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.17.
[114] Victor Gollancz, 'The Larger and The Smaller Lunacy,' The New Statesman, 7 December 1946. Reproduced in Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.93.

since there are spiritual things as well as physical, for which to pity them.'[115] As the trial of Joseph Kramer had made clear, justice for the 'Beast of Belsen' was considered to be part of the means to prove the moral distance that existed between the British and the defeated Germany, to illustrate to the world 'in cold, proven legal detail, exactly what happens behind the frontiers of a country that surrenders its soul to a dictator'.[116] Sympathy was an altogether different proposition and a step too far for the majority. Today, as evident in The Times article of 2005 to mark the anniversary of Belsen's liberation, the image of the 'Beast of Belsen' remains central to the balance between perpetrator and victor in Britain's memory of Belsen. Gollancz recognised that people might find his attitudes even more difficult to fathom if they were aware that he himself was Jewish; 'I am sometimes asked why, as a Jew, I bother about people in whose name infamies have been committed against my race, the memory of which, I fear – though I would wish it otherwise – may never die.'[117] Gollancz had visited Belsen – 'the most horrible of my experiences' – and during the visit had seen 'the tattoo marks on the arms of the Jewish survivors'. That visit, he argued meant that he was 'never likely to forget the unspeakable wickedness of which the Nazis were guilty'.[118] In Leaving Them To Their Fate Gollancz made clear his knowledge of the extent of the destruction; 'I am well aware of it: six million of the Jewish people were slaughtered by the Nazis...No, I don't need, God knows, to be told what Hitler did.'[119] To Gollancz and to his fellow campaigners Belsen was not only a symbol of Nazi brutality but also represented a benchmark against which the British should measure their behaviour towards Germany; not least because the victorious Britain now had 'a very special responsibility before the bars of history and of our own consciences'.[120] For Gollancz, the liberation year was not just Moorehead's 'special moment in the war', it was the year that created 'special responsibilities' and 'special obligations' for Britain. Gollancz explained to his readers the attitude of those like himself and Eleanor Rathbone; 'We reflected that, if every German was indeed responsible for Belsen, then we, as members of a democratic country and not of a fascist one with no free Press or parliament, were

[115] Victor Gollancz, Leaving Them To Their Fate, p.41.
[116] Richard Dimbleby in Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.200.
[117] Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.18.
[118] Victor Gollancz, 'Hunger Oedema,' The Times, 12 November 1946. Reproduced in Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.27.
[119] Victor Gollancz, Leaving The To Their Fate, p.33.
[120] Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.17.

responsible individually as well as collectively for refusing to tolerate anything that might be considered even remotely comparable with Belsen, if only by way of rhetoric.'[121] Few would share Gollancz's view of Britain's relationship with its defeated enemy or go as far in spelling out the nation's relationship with camps like Belsen. The combined impact of a government focus on the 'atrocity' of camps like Belsen and the intense attention given to the question of the German character ensured that reflection on the meaning of Britain's role as victor liberator remained largely undeveloped. Gollancz was right when he remarked that at the 'special moment in the war' Britons 'were engrossed with Germany'.[122] However, the 'big facts' of Britain's position in 1945 did not allow for the more sensitive or difficult questions of British responsibility towards the vanquished that Gollancz sought to raise. His work however, and his appeals once again to the British people to consider themselves and the future of their country illustrate the interconnectedness of a search for cognitive control and notions of national identity.

On 19 April 1945 the BBC broadcast Richard Dimbleby's report from the newly liberated Bergen Belsen concentration camp. The report has become 'the most famous, indeed iconic piece of journalism emerging from Belsen'.[123] Dimbleby's son Jonathan later described the report as 'an unforgettable, definitive statement about human atrocity'.[124] As explored, in the atmosphere of the spring of 1945 the 'atrocity' was not so much human as 'German'. The report is central to Britain's relationship with the Holocaust not only as a result of its powerful imagery and contemporary impact on British society in 1945. The report has a history and a life of its own that, as Judith Peterson and Tony Kushner's work suggests, reveals much with regard to British responses to Jews, to Belsen and to the Holocaust, both then and now.[125] It has been discovered that the report that the British people heard in 1945 was one of two made by Dimbleby at the camp. The unused report made reference to the Jewish identity of the majority of the camp's victims. The report that was finally broadcast

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[121] Victor Gollancz, In Darkest Germany, p.18.
[122] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.112.
[123] Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business', p.6.
[124] Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1975), p.190.
[125] Judith Peterson conducted her research as part of a PhD thesis on British television and the Holocaust at the University of Southampton. See also Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business'.

after the BBC's initial refusal to do so without verification was itself edited and made no such reference. In its broadcast form the report was interwoven with a universalising British approach to the identity of the Nazis' primary victims that had been evident throughout the 1930s.

Armed with what his son described as 'that rare confidence which allowed him to jump from the particular to the general and back again; from the smallest detail to the bold assertion', Richard Dimbleby confronted the desolation of Belsen in April 1945.[126] Dimbleby made his recording a few days after entering Belsen, having had some time to reflect and to compose himself. Making the recording from within the liberated camp would have offered him a distinct perspective not granted those who visited the camp only to return to Britain before writing or recording their responses – or what had, by then, become memories. As he had moved around the camp Dimbleby sought adequate descriptions of the camp's dead and dying victims for his listeners; 'They were like polished skeletons – the skeletons that medical students like to play practical jokes with.'[127] Perhaps working against the cumulative effect that the images included in his report would have had on the British in 1945, Dimbleby tried to convey to his audience that Belsen was not an alien world; 'Babies were born in Belsen.' Large numbers of Belsen's last victims were women and their suffering commanded Dimbleby's attention; 'I found a girl; she was a living skeleton, impossible to gauge her age for she had practically no hair left, and her face was only a yellow parchment sheet with two holes for eyes.' Alan Moorehead had had a similar encounter with a female Belsen prisoner. He recalled that 'an old hag, somewhat stronger than the others, was standing at the further door. "I'm twenty-one," she whispered'.[128] Dimbleby's journalistic wartime experiences served him as a point of comparison and as a means to try and portray the scale of the suffering and of his own shock; 'I have seen many terrible sights in the last five years, but nothing, nothing approaching the dreadful interior of this hut at Belsen.'[129] Dimbleby's report made reference to the evidence of cannibalism that he had seen in the camp, something that, as the *Introduction* to this piece has explored, has become a recurrent feature in the

[126] Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.197.
[127] Richard Dimbleby, 'The Cesspit Beneath', Belsen, 19 April 1945. Reproduced in Leonard Miall, (ed), Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster – By His Colleagues, (BBC, London, 1966), p.44.
[128] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.107.
[129] Richard Dimbleby, The Cesspit Beneath.

British memory of Belsen since 1945.'The report', Dimbleby later remembered, 'caused a lot of worry at Broadcasting House.'[130] Dimbleby returned to Belsen a month after its liberation to record another report for the programme The World Goes By. He described the lives of the camp's survivors, portraying a state of disconnectedness that is evident in many of the survivor testimonies explored in the previous chapter; 'people who had forgotten the simple customs and conventions of everyday life and were now lost in a terrible apathy brought about by unbearable misery'.[131] The personal impact of Belsen on Dimbleby was described by his fellow war correspondent Wynford Vaughn Thomas; 'here was a fundamentally decent man who had seen something really evil and hated it with all his strength'.[132] Dimbleby, like many of his fellow journalists, was appalled that 'there had been no privacy of any kind', again especially for Belsen's female victims.[133] It is perhaps a notion of Englishness, of English identity rather than British that is traceable throughout Dimbleby's record of Belsen and his response to the camp. There is a clear sense of the way in which Dimbleby measured what he saw in Belsen against his understanding of an English 'way of life.'

As in The Times article marking the sixtieth anniversary of Belsen's liberation, for Dimbleby the scale of the moral outrage in the camp was best conveyed to the 1945 British audience through the figure of the British soldier; 'One woman, distressed to the point of madness, flung herself at a British soldier who was on guard in the camp on the night it was reached by the 11th Armoured Division. She begged him to give her some milk for the tiny baby she held in her arms....when in his distress, he asked her to get up, she put the baby in his arms and ran off crying...when the soldier opened the bundle of rags to look at the child he found it had been dead for days.'[134] As Mark Connelly has explored, the image of the British Army soldier was, and continues to be, a key part of Britain's relationship with the Second World War. Whilst in 1939, 'the army was associated with the Western Front and the drudge of

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[130] Richard Dimbleby, Return to Belsen 1965. Reproduced in Leonard Miall, (ed), Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster, p.47.
[131] Richard Dimbleby, The World Goes By, May 1945. Reproduced in Leonard Miall, (ed), Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster, p.45.
[132] Wynford Vaughn-Thomas, Outrage. Reproduced in Leonard Miall, (ed), Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster, p.43.
[133] Richard Dimbleby, The Cesspit Beneath.
[134] ibid.

trench warfare. Dogged, determined and thoroughly British though its spirit might have been, many wondered whether it was simply an old boys club', by the end of the war British troops were militarily and morally victorious.[135] The British still reserve a particular reverence for the veterans of the conflict. The very 'ordinariness' and quiet resolve of the British soldier in the face of hardships and horrors was valued above all. It was the distress caused to the soldier in Dimbleby's report that brought home to the British people 'the world of a nightmare' that was Belsen.[136] In pointing out the soldier's distress Dimbleby did not seek to detract from that of the female Belsen inmate or to garner sympathy from his listeners for the soldier at the cost of what they might have felt for the woman. Rather, without any context for the sights of Belsen, Dimbleby's British identity provided him with the only means to gain any control over the camp. The victim's distress is magnified because it is witnessed by the British soldier, because of the chasm between the moral world of Belsen and Britain that Dimbleby could not have described any more clearly for his 1945 listeners than in the story of the woman and the soldier. Dimbleby's descriptions of British soldiers in the camp emphasised their status as members of a 'People's Army' connecting them at once to the people at home who listened to his report. This was perhaps most powerful when he described the treatment of a SS guard; 'He was writing out his confession while a young North-country anti-tank gunner of the 11th Armoured Division kept watch on him with a tommy-gun that never moved.'[137] The English soldier's youth and his steadfastness were powerful images. Mention of his 'North-country' origins made a direct connection to the report's listeners; a familiar landscape, a familiar accent perhaps, something of Britain, of England, ordinary and 'knowable' that both served to emphasise the different world of Belsen, but which also reassured and confirmed. Army doctors became 'our Army doctors' and the scale of destruction at Belsen was measured by the anger it had engendered in the British Army; 'those officers and men who have seen these things have gone back to the Second Army moved to an anger such as I have never seen in them before'.[138] Alan Moorehead had noted the same anger amongst British soldiers during his visit to Belsen. Emphasising the soldiers' 'ordinariness', Moorehead suggested that such

[135] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! p.201 and see especially Chapter 6, 'Bless 'em all: The British Army 1941 – 45.'
[136] Richard Dimbleby, The Cesspit Beneath
[137] ibid.
[138] ibid.

anger had altered the men physically as well as psychologically; 'A number of other British soldiers were standing about, all with the same hard, rigid expressions on their faces, just ordinary English soldiers, but changed by this expression of genuine and permanent anger.'[139] Moorehead used the words 'British' and 'English' to describe the soldiers. In their 'ordinariness' they became 'English'. The subtle change in description is evidence of the way in which a search for cognitive control over the destruction process often made it necessary for British observers to rely on an increasingly narrow understanding of national identity. Britishness was often replaced by a version of Englishness, one conjuring images of understated but resolute honour and strength of character or that drew on rural, idyllic or symbolic imagery of an island England of poetry and art. It is also perhaps noteworthy that Dimbleby bound the 'officers and men' of the Army together in their anger. Dimbleby's words connected English people to one another in their response to Belsen - himself, the officers and soldiers of the 'people's army' and the people at home. Dimbleby's audience were the English, and in concluding his report from Belsen, he addressed (and reassured) them directly; 'May I add to this story only the assurance that everything that an army can do to save these men and women and children is being done.'[140]

Richard Dimbleby did not share the same outspoken independence of thought of a Victor Gollancz or an Eleanor Rathbone. He was 'innocently accepting' of 'the values by which Britain was governed'.[141] He did not question the actions of the British Government during the war in the unrelenting way that they did. Indeed, 'he had never had cause or inclination before the war to doubt or even question the merits of Britain's social and political structures'.[142] Dimbleby was 'the leading British broadcaster of his day'.[143] In working for a BBC increasingly connected to those British social and political structures and in becoming one of the most recognisable voices in Britain during and after the war, he did not share their marginalized status in society – although arguably his tempestuous relationship with the BBC and forceful personality might suggest a degree of the maverick was shared by all three. He did

[139] Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', p.106.
[140] Richard Dimbleby, The Cesspit Beneath
[141] Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.203.
[142] ibid, p.203.
[143] Judith Peterson in Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business', p.25.

share, if not always from the same starting point, their distress at the nature of Britain's response to the defeated Germany in 1945; 'he hated the ugliness of Europe that summer' and had written: 'the recrimination, the revenge, and judgment...it's necessary I know. The heads must roll, but I wish they would roll without hysterical trials, poison and stomach pumps'.[144] However, just like Gollancz and the other members of the National Committee or Save Europe Now campaign team, Dimbleby did hold and was motivated by a commitment to a particular vision of Britishness, that was often, as we have seen, interchangeable with a powerful, emotive understanding of Englishness. As his report from Belsen also illustrated, like Parkes, Rathbone and Gollancz he communicated directly with the British people. Jonathan Dimbleby wrote of his father, 'He had felt deeply committed to the cause for which the war was fought; the defence of values and assumptions to which he gave unquestioning allegiance: 'democracy', 'freedom' and the British 'way of life.'[145] That understanding of British identity was often drawn from a particular interpretation of British history, of the 'national story'. For many in Britain, perhaps not least Winston Churchill, the events of the Second World War were part of a continuing and unbroken narrative of British history; a narrative that provided the proof that whilst the fight might be hard, the British way of life would continue. In 1945 Richard Dimbleby watched the victory celebrations on the Devon coast. His response is worth including in full; 'I thought that this was how it must have been when we saw the Spanish Armada coming, from the top of Plymouth Hoe, and again when we waited for Napoleon to come, and yet again – and how little time ago – when we waited with fire for another invader to come, with fire not to give the alarm but to burn and repel him. Now on this summer night, all round the dark coast of Britain, the fires were burning in villages and coves, not because the invader was coming, but as a bright and warm and comforting signal that no ship but a friendly ship should ever come to the shores of this island.'[146] The liberation by British troops of the concentration camp at Belsen was drawn into the 'national story'. In Belsen another part of Britain's, or significantly in this case, of England's history, had provided Dimbleby with a means of comparison, of control, a point of reference still; 'Like this must have been the

[144] Richard Dimbleby in Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.200.
[145] Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.203.
[146] Richard Dimbleby in Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.202.

plague pits in England three hundred years ago.'[147] The liberation of the camp remains part of a British/English national narrative of which the Second World is now both cog and wheel. Richard Dimbleby himself has arguably become part of that same narrative of British identity, that same source of cognitive control.

Unlike his fellow Britons, Gollancz and Rathbone, (and indeed unlike the level of engagement between the British people and the destruction of European Jewry during the war that is evidenced by their work), Dimbleby is not marginalized in British memory. His funeral in 1965 resembled a state occasion. At his death the controller of Television Programmes for the BBC described Dimbleby as 'the voice of the nation'.[148] Dimbleby's report from Belsen, as a part of Britain's perception of itself as a liberating nation, also commands a presence in British memory and in the popular history of the Home Front that the work of Parkes, Gollancz and Rathbone does not. There also remains an enduring connection between Britishness and the Dimbleby name. That connection is in turn related to the British memory of the Second World War and to the place of the BBC in British society - a partnership that remains active, as witnessed by the 2006 reporting in the Middle East. As Mark Connelly comments, 'the BBC's wartime ubiquity and the image of people listening to their wireless sets throughout the conflict has made it a significant part of the British popular memory'.[149] In the sixtieth anniversary year of 2005 the BBC in partnership with the Tate launched a major series entitled A Picture of Britain.[150] Described as 'an inspirational journey through art, landscape and identity' the series was written and presented by Richard Dimbleby's eldest son, David. Perhaps just as in 1945 when 'it was judged that Dimbleby was the BBC reporter who would best be able to reflect the mood of the British public on the eve of the coming victory', so too was it judged that his son should be the guide in 'a celebration of the British landscape' some sixty years later.[151] Focusing on the artistic and literary representations of the British landscape and people throughout history, the series achieved a rich and an often moving quality.

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[147] Richard Dimbleby, The Cesspit Beneath
[148] Huw Wheldon, BBC Controller of Television Programmes, December 1965. Reproduced in Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography. Foreword.
[149] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It!, p.161.
[150] A Picture of Britain, Written and Presented by David Dimbleby, produced by the BBC in partnership with the Tate, 2005. A book accompanied the series as did a major exhibition at the Tate in London of the paintings featured in the series.
[151] Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby: A Biography, p.189.

Although it might be argued that the 'picture' in the series' title referred to an artistic representation as opposed to a statement on contemporary British 'identity', the series did not represent a 'picture' of British life today. There may be those, particularly perhaps from regions that Dimbleby did not visit or that received only minimal attention, who might also argue that the series did not fulfil its title. However, aired during a summer of commemorations, celebrations and of atrocity in this country, the 'picture' of Britain that the series presented was that of the Britain of the 'national story'. Not only was the surname of the presenter somehow authoritative and familiar - it was a link in a chain. A late middle-aged woman, for example, stops Dimbleby during one of the episodes and simply asks 'are you one of the Dimbleby boys?' The titles of the individual episodes included 'The Romantic North', (the home, perhaps, of the young North country gunner in Belsen) 'The Heart of England' and 'The Mystical West'. Whilst arguably such titles reflected the perceptions of the artists, musicians and writers explored in the episodes, they may have also 'struck a chord' with an unnerved and nostalgic 2005 British audience. Finally, the series illustrated the way in which what Judith Peterson has called 'the monolithic underpinnings of Britain's wartime memory' extend to include the physical landscape of the country.[152] Richard Dimbleby's reflections on the place of the Second World War in a continuing narrative of British resolve and self defence were closely connected to the landmarks of the Devon coastline on which he found himself in 1945. Connelly has argued that in reaction to industrialisation in Britain throughout the nineteenth century and in the process of building an identity increasingly focused on a notion of Englishness, 'the true glory of the nation was placed in the soil, and the soil of south east England especially'.[153] By 1940 Southern England and its landscape had become 'The Home Front.' It still is and in 2005 the Picture of Britain episode covering the region was given the same title and *David* Dimbleby watched a Spitfire fly over the White Cliffs of Dover.

'We cannot re-create the responses to the concentration camp exposures as if it was 1945.'[154] Living in a world in which, as Colin Richmond laments, 'these obscene pictures are a commonplace in glossy brochures, on the covers of Holocaust and

[152] Judith Peterson, in Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business.', p.35.
[153] Mark Connelly, We Can Take It!, p.22.
[154] Tony Kushner, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business', p.26.

Genocide Studies, on the walls of Holocaust Museums', it is almost impossible to imagine the impact the images of liberation had in Britain in 1945.[155] What is clear is that 'shocked and horrified' could never be an adequate description of the diverse range of British responses. Anti-German hostility, even hatred coexisted with searching debate about the German character and Germany's future. Genuine sympathy for the victims was offset by a universalising attitude to their Jewish identities and a dehumanising language and mode of representation. A sense that something catastrophic had occurred was balanced by a need to find an explanation based in the familiar and within the understandable terms and definitions of past events and experiences. The shared space of 1945 ensured a partnership between Britain's wartime experience and its relationship with the destruction of European Jewry that remains central to Britain's construction of its *own* Holocaust today. At each stage of British response to the liberation of the concentration camps notions of Britishness *and* of Englishness, interpretations of the nation's history and definitions of its peoples' characters provided a source of cognitive control and drew the liberated camps, their victims and their perpetrators within the country's 'national story'. As explored in the following chapter, Britain's Jews were part of that complex British response, balancing Jewishness and Britishness in their attempt to respond to and cope with the tragedy in Europe.

[155] Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Antisemitism: The Reverend James Parkes 1896 – 1981, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2005), p.293.

Chapter Four

Britishness, Balance Sheets, Bystanders, Belonging and Belsen
British Jews and the Destruction of European Jewry

In May 1945 Victor Gollancz looked back on the years of military conflict that were coming to an end, 'Everywhere in the free world, and in the Resistance, men were fighting and dying and working for something, whatever might happen to their own lives; at the highest for a better civilisation, at the simplest for the freedom of their country and their friends. But the Jewish suffering was so utterly meaningless.'[1] This chapter will not provide a comprehensive study of the many and varied British Jewish responses to the 'sordid futility' of the Holocaust.[2] Yet in order to build a picture of their particular search for 'cognitive control', it will be vital to account for the plurality of British Jews' reactions during and after the destruction process. The central focus of the chapter will be the close reading of a number of significant and revealing case studies taken from across the spectrum of British Jewish life. Examples drawn from communal and representative bodies, from Zionist and non-Zionist publications and from particular individuals amongst British Jewry prove the need to account for the diversity of British Jewish thinking during the period. A review of the historiography surrounding the responses of Britain's Jewish community will form the starting point and the connections between that historiography and the wider study of British and Allied action during the destruction process will also be assessed. Maintaining the previous chapters' emphasis on the British response to the liberation of the camps, this chapter will explore the words, thoughts and memories of British Jews in the immediate aftermath of the destruction process in 1945. The aim will be to piece together the part played by the complex responses of the Anglo-Jewish community in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Britain's construction of its own manageable version and memory of the Holocaust revolves around the question of identity and belonging and in this chapter the partnership between British and Jewish identity will be centralised. British Jewish responses and reactions were shaped not only by the way in which Jews in this country understood their connection

[1] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere To Lay their Heads, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1945), p.2.
[2] ibid, p.2.

to the experiences of those Jews under Nazi control. They were also a product of what Howard Cooper has called, 'the dilemmas of British Jewish identity'.[3]

'At the next meeting I moved the appointment of an Executive Committee, consisting of the Executive Officers, the Joint Chairmen of the Joint Foreign Committee, the Chairman of the Law, Parliamentary and General Purposes Committee, and five other members of the Board, with power to co-opt three more members not necessarily members of the Board.'[4] A glance at the responses of British Jewry to the Nazi policy suggests a community swept up in a seemingly endless round of committee meetings, inter-communal disputes, the creation of new, rival or breakaway organisations and attempts to minimise the damage generated by political and ideological rifts. Armed with an ever-growing bank of knowledge regarding the Holocaust, on the surface it is surprising to confront what appears to be a Jewish community with its back resolutely turned away from the destruction of fellow Jews in Europe. Accounts detailing Board of Deputies meetings, the rise of Zionism and leadership disputes combine with a particular present day expectation and definition of action and of choice to leave us asking hopelessly 'Couldn't they see what was happening all around them? Why didn't they do something?' In this respect it is easy to forget that 'we are all co-presents witnessing, even if only through the media, the genocides, ethnic cleansing and other manifestations of extreme racism that besmirch the contemporary world'.[5] Richard Bolchover has posed the question 'Why was it that the Holocaust made such little impact on Anglo-Jewry?'[6] The British Jewish community was undoubtedly small and inward–looking. It was a community hampered by a perpetual fear of antisemitism and by a loyalty to British liberalism. The bulk of British Jewry certainly offered no sustained practical challenge to the wartime policy of the British state with regard to the Jews of Europe. And yet, British Jewry's response to the Nazis' meaningless exterminatory policy was a search for meaning nonetheless. A second glance at the reflections of British Jews in the months and years after 1945 reveals the

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[3] Howard Cooper and Paul Morrison, A Sense of Belonging: Dilemmas of British Jewish Identity, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1991).
[4] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs From Ghetto to Israel, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1960), p.193.
[5] Tony Kushner, 'Pissing in the Wind? The Search for Nuance in the Study of Holocaust "Bystanders"', in David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), 'Bystanders' to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation, (Frank Cass, London, 2002), p.60.
[6] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), p.156.

way in which the shadow of the situation in Europe fell across British Jewish life. The destruction process made itself manifest in a complex mixture of attempts amongst British Jews to contextualise the disaster. Many British Jews tried to find a place for the Holocaust in a familiar narrative of Jewish and of British history or tried to focus on the future and a new national definition of Jewish identity. Still others sought to place the Final Solution in the wider story of the failure of progress, of the Enlightenment and of humanity as a whole. The Holocaust did make an impact of British Jewry. That impact was absorbed, contained and recast in a narrative of British Jewish history and identity that, as in the non-Jewish British world, sought a degree of cognitive control over the disturbing newness of the situation in Europe. The words, actions and memories of British Jews therefore constitute another vital aspect of Britain's relationship with the destruction of European Jewry.

In his evaluation of British Jewish immediate response to the news of the liberation of the concentration camps, Dan Stone commented, 'Whether or not the Jewish communities of the liberal democracies did all they could to aid the Jews of Europe is not the point here.'[7] Much of the historiography surrounding British Jewish responses is preoccupied with the question of whether British Jewish action and reaction constituted an adequate response in the face of Nazi exterminatory policies in Europe. For many historians, it is, as Tony Kushner comments, 'the 'balance sheet' approach that has continued to dominate' the historical assessment of Allied response in general.[8] That approach focuses on 'what was done, and not done, for Jews persecuted by the Nazis'.[9] It is perhaps most succinctly illustrated in A.J. Sherman's conclusions about British reaction to the Nazi programme before 1939. Sherman gave his conclusion the title 'A Balance Sheet.'[10] The close association between the behaviour of British Jews and the wider debate surrounding the so called 'bystanders' to the Holocaust offers a possible explanation for the time and space given to the question of what might represent an 'adequate' British Jewish response. British Jewish reactions, in being connected to, or included within the category of 'bystander' are coloured by the focus on blame, rescue and the 'balance sheet' approach that the concept of the

[7] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence: Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain 1945-6', in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), p.16.
[8] Tony Kushner, 'Pissing in the Wind'?, p.63.
[9] ibid, p.63
[10] A.J. Sherman, Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933-1939, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973).

'bystander' can still generate. For example, in attempting to illustrate the weaknesses of the term, Raya Cohen comments that, 'it sometimes appears as though it is the bystanders – Switzerland, the Vatican, the Municipality of Paris or the Jewish leadership – that are occupying the seat of the accused in the place of the actual perpetrators'.[11] The category of 'bystander' when set alongside that of the victim and the perpetrator simply cannot account 'for the complexity of human responses during the Holocaust'.[12] To include British Jews – indeed to include Britain as a whole – within a simplistic definition of the 'bystander' leaves little or no room for the possibility of a different, more complicated connection between this country, all of its people and Europe's Jews, both then and now. The concept of the bystander also allows the behaviour of British Jewry to be considered within the parameters of a powerful, yet overtly simplistic judgement by which 'the actual rescue of life is largely considered the only way of measuring the acts of bystanders'.[13] In their own recent 're-evaluation' of the term 'bystander,' David Cesarani and Paul Levine explain 'that the category of 'bystanders' cannot be used in a uniform or unproblematic sense to describe the response of the democratic nations, their citizens, or the agencies which they sponsored and to which they played host during the persecution and mass murder of the Jews'.[14] The question of *why* Jewish communities beyond the reach of the Nazis acted in the manner in which they did is arguably subordinated to a tally of the relative successes and failures of their rescue, relief and compassionate efforts. There are those studies that claim to avoid such an approach and therefore the pitfalls of making a value judgement on British Jewry's actions. However these too often return to the question of whether the British Jewish community at best let their European brethren down or at worst were somehow complicit in their destruction through a failure to press the British government for further action or to act alone.

The title of Pamela Shatzkes' Holocaust and Rescue Impotent or Indifferent? Anglo – Jewry 1938-45 is in itself revealing in offering only two possible readings of British Jewish action. In her study, Pamela Shatzkes states of her research, 'Instead of

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[11] Raya Cohen, 'The Lost Honour of the Bystanders?', in David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), Bystanders to the Holocaust? A Re-evaluation, p.147.
[12] Tony Kushner, 'Pissing in the Wind?', p.61.
[13] Raya Cohen, 'The Lost Honour of the Bystanders?' p. 150.
[14] David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), Bystanders to the Holocaust? A Re-evaluation, p.269.

attempting to apportion blame or to answer hypothetical questions about responsibility, it offers an evaluation based on new and original evidence.' [15] Yet she continues, 'The book does not debate whether efforts were feasible in the light of what is known today' and 'the purpose of this book is not to pass moral judgement on the role of the Anglo-Jewish establishment'.[16] Certainly to fail to 'make the huge mental leap to ask what was known to those who could have only second-hand information at the time' [17] is to overlook the necessity for nuance. Making that 'leap' in the assessment of the knowledge and information available to those in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s is not always easy 'since democratic action and information, especially visual information, are so tightly interwoven in post modern society, there is a powerful tendency to project a similar nexus backwards in time'.[18] However to recognise the multiple and often contradictory attitudes regarding the Jews of Europe (and Jews in general) evident in Britain is, it must be argued, central to the fair and accurate assessment of Allied activity during and after the Holocaust. Shatzkes' study sets out to prove that 'Anglo – Jewry's efforts, both before and during the war, were strenuous and unremitting.'[19] Her conclusions do not always achieve the distance from present day judgments nor from those implicit in Sherman's 'balance sheet' that her introduction promises. Nor indeed do those conclusions always provide the more positive reading of British Jewish action that she argues has been lacking amongst historians.[20]

Shatzkes is critical of what she perceives as the negative reading of British Jewish reaction in Richard Bolchover's 1993 work, British Jewry and the Holocaust.[21] Bolchover attempted to examine 'what the community's response to this historical experience reveals about its own organisational structure and socio-political philosophy'.[22] Bolchover did conclude that 'it was not the destruction of European Jewry that was at the top of the Anglo – Jewish institutional agenda during the Second

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[15] Pamela Shatzkes, Holocaust and Rescue Impotent or Indifferent? Anglo – Jewry 1938 – 1945, (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 6.
[16] ibid, p.8.
[17] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.7.
[18] David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), Bystanders to the Holocaust, Introduction, p.14.
[19] Pamela Shatzkes, Holocaust and Rescue, p.7.
[20] For an overview of the particular historians to whom Shatzkes refers see the Introduction to her study, pp.1-9.
[21] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust.
[22] ibid, p.1.

World War'. He also recognised 'the existence of a strong and abiding sense of communal loyalty among the Jews of Europe' and his study attempted to 'investigate how it was manifested' in Britain.[23] Bolchover pieced together the role that religious and national identity, questions of belonging and of Britishness played in the diverse responses of Britain's Jews to the destruction process. His stated aim was to firstly make 'a contribution to the understanding of Anglo – Jewry'.[24] The extent of the debate over the nature of British Jewish response is evident in the differences in approach between Bolchover and Shatzkes. For example, Bolchover's assessment that 'the Holocaust was not high on the Anglo–Jewish agenda, but it was there'[25] has nonetheless lead Shatzkes to conclude that 'some, like Bolchover, believe that the Anglo – Jewish organisations turned a blind eye to the mounting evidence of the plight of European Jewry'.[26] For Shatzkes, British Jewish community leaders' decisions made at the time are frequently described as 'naïve' or indeed 'hopelessly unrealistic'. In his 1999 work Britain and the Holocaust: The Failure of the Anglo-Jewish Leadership? Meier Sompolinsky has argued that 'Jewish public figures were not shaped for leadership material and were not powerful and enterprising movers and shakers, and therefore could not cope in those abnormal circumstances.'[27] However, in what is a highly emotive study, Sompolinsky reserved his strongest criticism for a British government that 'fulfilled their blockade/closure policy' against 'Jews hoping to escape Europe' with 'unnecessary fanatical obsession'.[28] The title of Sherman's conclusion echoes throughout Shatzkes' own final assessment that is entitled 'Lack of Will or Lack of Skill?' British Jewish action is still weighed in the balance and found wanting even if it is, in this instance, couched in terms of awarding points for effort. Research has proved the amount of information regarding the destruction process that was available in Britain to Jews and non-Jews both before and during the Second World War. Ultimately, however, the luxury of distinguishing the unrealistic from the practical and possible in relation to the Nazis' exterminatory policy is perhaps – and still only just - available to those armed with hindsight. It is not then, as Shatzkes claims, an approach that 'eschews the didactic and speculative approaches to

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[23] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.4.
[24] ibid, p. 1.
[25] ibid, p.18.
[26] Pamela Shatzkes, Holocaust and Rescue, p.5.
[27] Meier Sompolinsky, Britain and the Holocaust: The Failure of the Anglo-Jewish Leadership?, (Sussex Academic Press, London, 1999), p.4.
[28] ibid, p.3.

historical interpretation'.[29] The suggestion in Shatzkes' work that the behaviour of British Jewish leaders was naïve assumes the possibility of an alternative response of which British Jews should somehow have been aware. Both Bolchover and Shatzkes include British Jews within the category of bystander response (although interestingly Bolchover also offers an alternative phrase in 'onlooker' that arguably has a greater degree of ambiguity than the now more popularly used 'bystander').[30] Such a stance cannot account for the complex process by which British Jews reacted to, attempted to understand and finally to bring under control the events in Europe. Finally, in Shatzkes' study the fine, but crucial line between whether British Jewish responses were actually naïve then or rather seem so now is still blurred. That fact suggests a need to return to David Cesarani and Paul Levine's cautionary reminder that 'because we react to what we see today, we expect those who 'saw' things in the past also to have reacted'. It is in our world today that 'to react is to chose'.[31]

Small, relatively well-integrated, though never homogenous, the British Jewish community had shared the turbulent advent of the twentieth century with the rest of British society. The arrival of large numbers of Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe in the years before the First World War and the challenges of the war itself led to radical changes in the communal structures and leadership of British Jewry. The consequences of those changes were often in evidence during the years when the Nazis were in power. Gradually control over the institutions and organisations that influenced Jewish life in Britain moved away from the wealthy families who had traditionally held power to the descendants of the immigrants, although as David Cesarani comments still by the 1920s 'the old social and political elite retained control of the commanding heights of British Jewry'.[32] The growth of Zionism might be said to have dominated British Jewish politics during the years of the destruction process. However communism, anti-Zionism and trade unionism also caught the attention of many British Jews and played their part in shaping the response to the Nazi's 'Final Solution'.

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[29] Pameal Shatzkes, Holocaust and Rescue, p.6.
[30] Raul Hilberg also used the phrase 'Onlooker' as a chapter title. The title of the work in which the chapter appears is Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-45, (Harper Collins, New York, 1992).
[31] David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), Bystanders to the Holocaust, p.14.
[32] David Cesarani, 'Communal Authority in Anglo – Jewry, 1914-1940', in David Cesarani (ed), The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1990), p.122.

Richard Bolchover has commented of the British Jewish community that faced the onset and consequences of the Nazis' exterminatory policies that 'its structure testified to and fortified an almost universally accepted Anglo – Jewish socio-political philosophy stemming from a perception of emancipation, liberalism, patriotism and the Jews' relation to the state in which they lived'.[33] Established British Jews regarded their emancipation in British society as the product of a natural and inherent British liberalism and tolerance. That liberalism, they believed, required unfailing loyalty to the British nation and their continued integration into British society. An ever present fear of domestic British antisemitism (and therefore of being reminded of their hyphenated identity), left the British Jewish community unnerved by the prospect of newcomers. Established British Jews were unwilling in the main part to question the policies of the British government. They were concerned to ensure that the arrival of German Jewish refugees fleeing the newly-established Nazi regime should not test the delicate terms of the 'emancipation contract.' British Jewish responses during the 1930s were therefore largely defined by an attempt to manage the situation within the community. A guarantee made to the British Government that 'all expense, whether temporary or permanent' created by the arrival and admission of German Jewish refugees in Britain would be met by the British Jewish community represented 'their single most crucial intervention in the British response to Jewish refugees from the Third Reich'. [34] The speed with which British Jewish leaders were able to come up with the guarantee proved, Vivian Lipman has argued, that 'the communal leadership was able to react swiftly to a new situation'.[35] The refugees, it was emphasised, would only remain in Britain for a short time whilst their continued migration elsewhere was arranged. As Louise London comments, 'The package of proposals bore the hallmark of the Anglo – Jewish tradition, in which charitable aid to poor Jewish migrants went hand in hand with minimising the embarrassment they caused.'[36] Conscious always of their own status in British society, British Jewish communal and charitable leaders

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[33] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.30.
[34] Louise London, 'Jewish Refugees and British Government Policy, 1930-1940' in David Cesarani, (ed), The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry, p.166.
[35] Vivian Lipman, 'Anglo-Jewish Attitudes to the Refugees from Central Europe 1933-1939', in Werner Mosse, (ed), Second Chance: Two Centuries of German Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom, (J.C.B Mohr, Tubingen, 1991), p.523.
[36] Louise London, Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), p.29.

were concerned to minimise any negative attention the new refugees from Germany might generate – as much for themselves and their own position in Britain as for the benefit of the refugees. Thus the guarantee was also accompanied by the unspoken assumption 'that the Anglo-Jewish community would itself control and contain the impact of the new arrivals on the host community'.[37] In place until the crisis became all-consuming in the months before the outbreak of war, the guarantee allowed the British government to leave the tenets of a strict immigration control procedure in place. The Jewish community shouldered the financial burden of those refugees granted entry. Genuine humanitarian concern amongst British Jews regarding their fellow Jews in Germany in the years before the war was combined with a continued fear of British antisemitism, an insecure and introverted perspective and a self-conscious loyalty to Britain so that ultimately, 'refugees and action on their behalf were incorporated into a process of assimilation'.[38]

An emphasis on refugees and their aid continued as the Second World War began despite the continually decreasing number of those able to escape. The attention given to the plight of German Jewish refugees by the British Jewish community during the 1930s played a particular part in the community's response to 1945. In 1945 British Jews often continued to centralise the experiences of German Jews in their efforts to aid survivors, to account for the camps and in their response to the images of liberation. That focus on German Jews and Jewish suffering *in* Germany then limited British Jews' ability or willingness to come to terms with the totality of the destruction process and the many nationalities of its victims. Despite lacking the resources needed to come anywhere close to matching the scale of the situation in Europe, philanthropy and the collection of funds became the mainstay of British Jewish responses. Such charitable contributions allowed British Jewry, Bolchover has argued, to 'avoid the disadvantages.... of more high profile political intervention'.[39] Charitable work also allowed British Jews to feel that they were actively responding to the crisis, that they were making a contribution. However whilst the final goal of their efforts might have been in Europe, the organisation and collection of charitable funds also meant a continued focus inwards. Charity served as a distraction as British

[37] Louise London, 'Jewish Refugees and British Government Policy, 1930-1940', p.170.
[38] ibid, p.190.
[39] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p. 69.

Jews concentrated on the workings and structures of their own community, albeit with the intention of using those structures to collect funds for Jews abroad. Arguably those charitable efforts also illustrated a failure or an unwillingness to grasp the particularity of the Jewish experience in Europe. No amount of money, however efficiently collected or willingly given could make a difference on its own. British Jewish approaches to those in power, to those in Britain potentially able to make a difference, were frequent. Their visits were, for example, considerable in the days and weeks surrounding the announcement of the Allied Declaration in December 1942. And yet, these were often carried out by individuals or small groups and were consistently low key in nature. With the important exception of a number of remarkable but often marginal individuals, the British Jewish leadership did not question the British Government's overriding policy that military victory represented the only means by which to save all of Hitler's victims, Jews included. A desire to avoid any accusation of dual loyalty that arguing for a specific response to the unique set of circumstances facing European Jews might generate also limited the impact of British Jewish efforts.

'In spite of considerable awareness of the real situation', Dan Stone has argued, Anglo-Jewry 'underwent a process of "writing out" of extremity' in the years immediately following the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps.[40] That 'writing out', he has suggested, was a product of a British Jewish unease and guilt concerning the community's response to the disaster in Europe. That unease was confounded by a relationship with Britain and British society 'that did not permit an in depth probing of the enormity of what had occurred'.[41] The disaster in Europe had competed for the attention of wartime British Jewry with the impact of Zionist control over the Board of Deputies. In turn a frustrating lack of unity had created a lack of faith in the communal leadership. The idea of the new national home and the work towards making it a reality may itself, Bolchover suggests, 'have diverted money and efforts away from Europe'.[42] As the responses to liberation in this chapter suggest, the situation in Palestine featured prominently in British Jewish thinking as the war came to an end. During the war, protest meetings, days of mourning and prayer and the

[40] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.19.
[41] ibid, p.16.
[42] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.71.

black borders of the Jewish Chronicle during December 1942, marked the moments when the situation in Europe commanded the British Jewish community's full attention. However, the absence of a 'continuous organised campaign' on behalf of Hitler's Jewish victims ultimately defined British Jewish wartime response.[43] The lack of confidence needed to press those in power limited the possibility of decisive action. Recourse to gestures and actions that might have worked in the past but which the situation in Europe made redundant left British Jews powerless to move forward. Furthermore, the disturbing questions regarding identity and belonging that the ideals of Zionism triggered left British Jews distracted. The case studies explored in the remaining sections of this chapter reveal how British Jews attempted to bring the chaos in Europe within a 'culturally safe' narrative of British Jewish identity.[44] If, indeed, they are testament to a British Jewish attempt to 'write out', to avoid a direct confrontation with the experience of their European brethren, then that does not mean that the destruction process and its impact was absent from these British Jewish publications. After all, Victor Gollancz described writing his 1945 account of the suffering in Europe as 'an agony'.[45] Britain's relationship with the Holocaust is not written out of Gollancz's work or from the other examples of British Jewish reaction that follow. In the first of those examples, the pages of the Zionist Review for the months of 1945 prove the complex nature of British Jewish response and the extent to which that response was embedded in the British environment.

The Zionist Review, the journal of the Zionist Federation, was published weekly throughout 1945. The regular nature of its publication means that an assessment of the Zionist Review makes it possible to build a picture of British Jewish responses to 1945 as they changed and developed during the liberation year. The identities of its contributors and the style and content of their work reveals another useful case study of the attempts made by ordinary British people to search for, and obtain a degree of cognitive control over, the destruction process and its consequences. The Zionist Review is a key indicator of British Jewish attitudes during the liberation year. Following Selig Brodetsky's election to President of the Board of Deputies and with the Zionist Caucus in the majority on the Board, by 1945 the mainstream Zionist

[43] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.18.
[44] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence,' p.16.
[45] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.5.

Review might be said to have represented the views at the heart of British Jewry. Each edition of the journal consisted of a number of short articles written by both the journal's editors and by contributors. The latter, especially in 1945, were often gathered from across Europe and from Palestine. Several of the articles featured during 1945 were reports from liberated German concentration camps. Arguably the Zionist Review did not include the same wide ranging or detailed reports from the different European countries affected by Nazism as the National Committee for Rescue's News from Hitler's Europe. The Zionist Review did not, of course, share the same singular focus on the question of the rescue of European Jews that the Committee's bulletin had done. What the two publications did share was the mixture of contributions from British Jews and non-Jews and a particular perception of Britishness. The Jewish Chronicle might certainly be regarded as the foremost example of British Jewish reporting and the most widely read publication amongst British Jewry during the destruction process. It 'reported on almost all public matters of Jewish concern and its reportage.....was on the whole impartial and comprehensive'.[46] However, the Jewish Chronicle was concerned with the business of reporting the news. It was often only able to give limited editorial space to any real discussion of the events in Europe. Publications such as the Zionist Review offered another forum for British Jewish responses. The smaller articles in the Zionist Review often took intellectual or cultural issues as their subject, allowing more time and space for detailed debate or for the development of ideas over a period of time. Those articles and the preoccupations of their writers allow for a close analysis of British Jewish responses to the Holocaust. Set alongside the other examples in this chapter, the 1945 editions of the Zionist Review also make it possible to piece together a picture of the nature of wartime British Jewry. The Zionist Review represents one way to trace the community's first attempts to build a memory of the war and of the disastrous events in Europe.

On 13 April 1945, days before the liberation of Bergen Belsen, the Zionist Review announced the establishment of the 'One Million Pounds Appeal' by the Central British Fund to aid Jewish survivors in Europe.[47] For the contributors and readers of the Zionist Review the continuation of British Jewish financial collections and

[46] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.1.
[47] Zionist Review, 13 April 1945.

philanthropic work on behalf of the surviving Jews still in Europe could only be a temporary measure. The creation of a new national home for the Jewish people represented the real solution. As the liberation year drew on their articles were increasingly directed towards the part survivors could play in the creation of the new state and calls for its immediate inception; 'There can be only one radical solution to the problem of Jewish survivors of Nazi bestiality; to open wide the gates of the Jewish National home to those anxious to leave the places where their co-religionists have been degraded, tortured and murdered.'[48] The idea of the new state provided something practical, something to build towards and to plan for and a ready made answer to the logistical problem of the survivors and Displaced Persons left behind after liberation. On 11 May 1945 in an editorial entitled, 'In the Name of Justice', and illustrating the extent of the information available regarding the situation in Europe, the journal commented, 'The Jewish survivors of Buchenwald, Bergen Belsen, Maidjanek and Oswiecim have no place to which they can return. Those Jews in Europe who have physically survived have no homes; the prospects of getting back their property are slender. They cannot obtain a livelihood from paper promises of "equal rights."'[49] The conditions faced by Jewish survivors in the camps represented an opportunity to reassert the Zionist cause; 'They also want to know what is to be the future status of all those homeless Jews and what will happen to the one thousand poor orphans.'[50] With their minds fixed on the future the 1945 contributors to the Zionist Review would frequently refer to the Jewish child survivors in their reports from the liberated camps. Victor Gollancz did the same as he explained to his readers in 1945; 'These children had seen their parents shot, gassed and cremated before their eyes. "Why shall we go now?" was the question everyone, especially these orphan children asked.'[51] As 1945 drew on, the Zionist Review came to regard the lack of a national home as the cause of the survivors' continued suffering in Europe. On 6 July the journal reported on the situation of the remaining Jews in the liberated camps and asked 'Whose Concern?' The writer continued; 'By their statelessness they have forfeited the care and direction given to other inmates of the concentration camps by representatives of their respective governments, for the reason that they are no one

[48] 'Victory – What Next?', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[49] 'In the Name of Justice', Zionist Review, 11 May 1945.
[50] 'Buchenwald Survivors', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[51] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.5.

government's concern.' [52] The article concluded; 'The only natural home for the unhappy people, especially the children, is Palestine.'[53]

Zionism, Dan Stone has argued, provided many British Jews with a form of 'psychological compensation' as liberation confirmed the extent of the disaster in Europe.[54] The emphasis on the future that the idea of the national home seemed to offer provided many British Jews with a point of focus in 1945. It also served as a means by which to cope with the disturbing possibility that the liberalism that had been the cornerstone of British Jewish life may have 'prevented a full understanding of what was occurring during the war'.[55] Zionism not only met a need for a plan of action. It also served as a distraction, directing attention away from the sites of murder and destruction. It is also made it possible for British Jews to turn away from the question of how their own world and their own actions connected to the situation in Europe. A desire to move on, evident amongst some British Jews, may have betrayed a growing sense of doubt over their own response during the years when the destruction process had been ongoing. The writers of the Zionist Review however, were impatient. They did not want to look backwards. The liberation year and even the destruction process itself represented an opportunity to move forward, to look beyond liberated concentration camps to the future. That opportunity, they argued, could not be lost. Rather than representing evidence of an conscious attempt to ignore the destruction process, the concentrated attention given to the formation of the new state suggests an inability amongst some British Jews to confront the past. Few wanted to make their worst fears a reality by airing them publicly. Those fears surrounded not only the meaning of the events in Europe, but also related to British Jew themselves, so that Dan Stone concludes, 'the energy invested in Palestine betrays the fact that there was both an awareness of the enormity of what had happened in Europe and a simultaneous need not to admit this knowledge consciously'.[56] The private and personal feelings and opinions of individual British Jews regarding the destruction process may not always have corresponded with the picture painted by newspapers, journals or by the communal leadership. However, in

[52] 'Whose Concern?', Zionist Review, 6 July 1945.
[53] ibid.
[54] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.27.
[55] ibid, p.27.
[56] ibid, p.25.

tracing the role that their relationship with Britain played in shaping their response to the Nazi policy it is, Bolchover has argued, 'only by a study of what British Jews were prepared to say and do in public that we can determine the contours on the map of Anglo-Jewish attitudes regarding the outside, non- Jewish world'. [57]

Throughout 1945 the Zionist Review editions called for the specific nature of European Jewish suffering to be recognised. Those calls coexisted with an attempt to see the disaster as part of a wider, universal, historical narrative. A lack of response in the wider world to the Jewish persecution was lamented. The shock of the British people in 1945 was explained as the natural reaction of decent people to the work of German monsters. A sense of unease and of confusion permeated the writing. References to the destruction process were recorded in emotional but generalised language and were secondary to a focus on the future. Survivors were discussed in terms of the aid they required and of their future prospects. The detail of their experiences before 1945 was rapidly consigned to a past that needed to be moved on from, despite, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, the reality that 1945 represented merely a continuation in their suffering for many survivors. Their individual stories and the reality of the policy that had brought them to Belsen and to Buchenwald were universalised in language that referred to 'the great mystery of evil', 'suffering', 'Nazi sadism', 'the nightmare', 'the cruel tragedy' and 'brutal attacks'.[58] If this kind of language, evident across much of British Jewish response, 'implicitly negated much of the force of the subject under examination', then that need not have been the result of a conscious decision, of a deliberate attempt to avoid the facts,[59] not least because the same language appeared in non-Jewish British press reporting during 1945. The reader is instead aware of an arguably distinctly British emphasis on not dwelling on or openly discussing the difficult or the distressing and on the natural British remedy to be found in simply keeping busy, evident in the direct, persistent, almost hurried tone of much of the Zionist Review reporting. The peculiarly British tone of many of the British Jewish responses in 1945 lead Dan Stone to use another distinctly British phrase to describe them. The writing, he argued, of individuals like Victor Gollancz

[57] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.3.
[58] Zionist Review Editorial titles for editions from April to September 1945.
[59] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.17.

represented 'a paradigmatic case of the "stiff upper lip".[60] To pause, to leave the prospect of the new national home for a moment and to consider instead that which had gone before and its implications for British Jewry, was, it seems, unthinkable for the contributors to the Zionist Review in 1945.

Produced in the context of British society during the liberation year, the Zionist Review shared many of the concerns and preoccupations of the British press as a whole. The achievement of victory itself merged with the Zionist Review's reporting on the liberation of the camps in a partnership that proved crucial for the way in which Britain responded to the events of 1945. On 11 May 1945 the Zionist Review announced, 'We are united today with the people of Britain and all freedom loving nations in prayer and thankfulness for the deliverance from the common enemy.'[61] Perhaps representative not only of a continued sense of a need to prove their loyalty to the British nation, but also of a growing British Jewish need to account for their own actions in the years before 1945, the announcement of victory and the scenes of liberation prompted the Zionist Review writers to recall 'the more than one million Jews who have fought in the Allied armies'.[62] On 27 April they had also noted; 'It is impossible to read without deep emotion how members of the Jewish Brigade and Jewish soldiers of the Allied Armies lead Nazi murderers to captivity.'[63] For this journal, like so many British publications in 1945, the liberation of the concentration camps provided the proof of Nazi criminality and thus the moral validity of the war. Retribution, as promised, would mean that 'the criminals' would be 'hunted down and brought to trial from the remotest corner of the earth and dragged out from the deepest hiding place'.[64] Any remnant of doubt regarding the extent of Nazi brutality could now be quashed, the camps providing 'proof positive' of the scale of the atrocity. On 27 April 1945 an article in the Zionist Review commented on the parliamentary delegation to the liberated camps in Germany that; 'The impressions brought home by this all party group will carry authority nobody can question, and their trained powers

[60] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.23.
[61] 'In the Name of Justice', Zionist Review, 11 May 1945.
[62] ibid.
[63] 'Victory – What Next?', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[64] 'Crimes Against Humanity', Zionist Review, 13 April 1945.

of speech will enforce credence of facts which have too long seemed unbelievable to many people in this sheltered island.'[65]

It is also noteworthy that Britain's island status was frequently invoked in the British Jewish writing of 1945. Whilst this particular Zionist Review contributor used the image to suggest that Britain had been slow to believe the news from Europe, for others 'this beloved island' provided evidence of Britain's distinctly different status, of its role as the last bastion of decency in a world gone mad.[66] British Jewish (and non-Jewish) writers would also often replace 'Britain' for 'England' in their 1945 work. The prevalence of the island image may also be evidence of the extent to which the months when Britain had 'stood alone' had already taken on mythical status by 1945. In the writing of British Jews specifically however the positive representation of Britain may be testament to a particular and self-conscious expression of loyalty to which the patriotism of 1945 only added.

On 20 July 1945 the Zionist Review reflected on the impact created by the events of liberation; 'The world was horrified when the facts about Buchenwald, Belsen and Dachau and the other camps were made known.'[67] Earlier in the month, the journal had made a similar point; 'Two months ago the whole world was horrified when the first reports came through about the plight of the people in Buchenwald, Belsen, Dachau and the other extermination centres in Germany. The press, radio, cinema were all employed to bring home the horror of the camps to the people of Britain.'[68] Just as in much of the British press, (both in 1945 and in 2005) liberation was represented as a revelation, bringing the shock of the unknown to the British people for the first time. However for the Zionist Review writers that 'revelation' was reserved for the non-Jewish world. In their writing, the 'world's' shock at the images of liberation was mentioned only to make clear how fleeting that response had been and how late it had come. 'Professions of sympathy'[69] from the rest of the world had not, the journal argued, generated an adequate practical response from the non-Jewish

[65] Blanche Dugdale, 'The Camps and their Moral', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[66] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.19.
[67] 'Humanity and Common Sense', Zionist Review, 20 July 1945.
[68] 'Whose Concern?', Zionist Review, 6 July 1945.
[69] ibid.

British world; 'the Jews in Germany are still in the camps'.[70] The Jewish community and those involved in refuge and rescue work had, the Zionist Review suggested, lived with the knowledge of what had been happening in Europe long before 1945. Liberation meant a confirmation of *their* worst fears and that only 'at long last' were the rest of 'the British public beginning to learn the truth'.[71]

During 1945 the journal did share with the wider British press the same distortions evident in British attempts to piece together the facts of the destruction process. The Zionist Review's use of the phrase 'extermination centre' suggested a sense of the scale of the destruction. However, the writers also shared the same emphasis on Germany and the western concentration camps that shaped British response to liberation in 1945. That focus on Germany limited understanding of the place of those camps in relation to one another. The writers' choice of language to describe the liberated camps varied. Buchenwald was described as 'a torture camp' and also labelled alongside Belsen as 'an extermination camp'. The legacy of a British focus on the concentration camps of the 1930s lead, as we have seen, to important distortions in the representation and memory of the concentration and death camp system and especially of its victims. Throughout its 1945 editions, the Zionist Review's reporting was mainly concerned with the camps in Germany, primarily those at Belsen and Buchenwald. A closer focus on the suffering of German Jews was also in evidence. On 20 July 1945 the Zionist Review's editorial stated that 'During the last 12 years Jews in Germany have been persecuted, tortured and murdered.' It went on, 'the Jews in Germany are still in the camps; they are still segregated from the outside world. Those German Jews who have struggled home from concentration camps, returned penniless'.[72] The Zionist Review's descriptions of the liberated also followed a similar pattern to that evident across British responses. For example, in an article on Auschwitz survivors; 'These shadows of human beings with sunken eyes and gaunt cheeks wrapped in rags all look insane.'[73] Yet, like much of British society in 1945, it was the names of Buchenwald and Belsen that the Zionist Review believed would 'be infamous forever'.[74] When the camps at Maidjanek and Auschwitz were

[70] 'Humanity and Common Sense', Zionist Review, 20 July 1945.
[71] 'Man's Inhumanity to Man', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.
[72] 'Humanity and Common Sense', Zionist Review, 20 July 1945.
[73] 'Oswiecim Documentary Film', Zionist Review, 14 September 1945.
[74] Blanche Dugdale, 'The Camps and their Moral', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.

mentioned, on 11 May for example, the two camps appeared in a list that put Buchenwald and Belsen first.[75] Interestingly, by the September of 1945, the Zionist Review described 'Oswiecim' as 'this monstrous death camp where German fascists tortured to death over 4,000,000 people'.[76] On the surface, the journal's reference to this extermination centre suggests some sense of its physical scale and of the scale of the murder committed there. However the description also reveals the limitations of British Jewish (and non-Jewish) understanding in 1945 regarding the camp itself and its place in the camp system. The Zionist Review drew, like much of the British press, on the (inaccurate) estimates of the numbers murdered at the camp offered by the Soviet liberators. They did not challenge those numbers nor did they expand any further on their meaning. The Zionist Review believed that the camp's prisoners had been 'tortured to death'. The journal did not question the idea that four million people could have been killed in this particular way; it did not ask *how* four million people could be 'tortured to death'. In 1945 the Zionist Review writers had no sense of the immediacy of death at Auschwitz. They had little understanding of, nor perhaps a desire to discuss in any further detail, the methods of murder used in the camp. The word 'torture' could be understood. However awful, it offered the possibility that what had occurred in the camps could be explained because 'torture' had happened before. The Zionist Review's account of Auschwitz was at odds with itself. Whilst the use of 'four million' suggested some sense of an unprecedented, unfamiliar level of destruction, the use of the word 'torture' placed that destruction in a historical narrative of suffering, perhaps particularly of Jewish suffering, that provided a much sought after context for the camp. The impact of the stated number was lost and any sense of the individual experiences of those murdered was minimised. The number itself and the word 'torture' were as much a statement on the extent of the perpetrators' barbarity as they were an attempt to illustrate the scale of Jewish suffering (although, it must be noted, the Zionist Review did not refer to 'four million *Jewish* people' in its description of those murdered at Auschwitz). The journal did not use the word 'Nazis' to describe the perpetrators at Auschwitz. Again, like many non-Jewish British publications in 1945, it was 'the Germans' who were responsible for the crime. In the Zionist Review article on Auschwitz, the reference to 'German fascists' not only illustrates the British concentration on the guilt of Germany and the

[75] 'In the Name of Justice', Zionist Review, 11 May 1945.
[76] 'Oswiecim Documentary Film', Zionist Review, 14 September 1945.

German people in 1945. The phrase also betrays the writers' lack of understanding regarding the differing nationalities and social or political backgrounds of those individuals who had operated the extermination centre.

It was the mentality of the perpetrators, something that consumed much of the British press, which also received the Zionist Review's attention. The distinction between Nazis and the German people was blurred and both were represented as monsters. The actions of the Nazis in the now liberated camps had represented something otherworldly and something beyond the understanding of ordinary people; 'The stories of Buchenwald and Bergen Belsen are too horrible for a normal human being to comprehend.'[77] The camps and their 'German' perpetrators represented an offence to the British people's worldview; 'The British conscience has revolted against the horrors'[78] because naturally 'the British people abhor the Nazi spirit.'[79] Days after the liberation of Belsen, the journal noted; 'Scientific' methods of torture were used by the Nazi brutes whose sadism had no limits.'[80] Both the British Jewish and non-Jewish press had been horrified by the systematic and what it frequently termed 'scientific' nature of the destruction process. The notion that science, so often associated with man's progress, had been adapted to the purpose of mass murder seemed incomprehensible and provided journalists (and governments) with one of the most powerful adjectives in any attempt to bring home the scale of Nazi guilt. On 27 April 1945, the non-Jewish Mrs. Edgar Dugdale, or Blanche Dugdale, niece of Arthur Balfour and staunch supporter of the Zionist cause, wrote one of her frequent contributions to the Zionist Review. Describing the concentration camps as 'festering sores on the German body politic', Dugdale used the words Nazi and German interchangeably. Like many letter writers to The Times and to The Daily Mail in 1945 Dugdale focused her attention on the mentality and behaviour of the German people; 'The problem will not be simplified by trying to classify the Germans into "good" and "bad", nor indeed is it likely to be solved by any pre-conceived ideas.'[81] For Dugdale the Germans were the problem that needed to be solved. She was less than convinced by the possibility of teaching the German people the error of their ways; 'whither the

[77] 'Man's Inhumanity to Man', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.
[78] 'Confusion of Thought', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[79] Blanche Dugdale, 'The Camps and their Moral', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[80] 'Man's Inhumanity to Man', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.
[81] Blanche Dugdale, 'The Camps and their Moral', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.

next generation of this people will be capable of achieving normality through any process of 're-education' that the western powers are capable of devising, remains to be seen'.[82] Aware perhaps of the reminders given by a minority in British society that not all Germans were willing participants in Hitler's regime, she responded categorically; 'Make every allowance for the terror of the Gestapo etc but never forget that all these thugs are themselves Germans, and that their name is legion.'[83] As for many Britons, it was the proximity of the British and Allied troops to the concentration camps and the contrast in values and behaviour which that meeting seemed to prove, that convinced Dugdale of Germany's downfall; 'everything observed so far during the advance of the British and American armies seems to show that the German nation as a whole is not in a fit state even to recognise when it sees them, the standards of decent behaviour'.[84] Dugdale's Christianity often shaped her perspective on the meaning of liberation. A Christian discourse is traceable throughout her comments. Struggling to explain the Nazis' or what she regarded as the Germans' actions, Dugdale could finally only fall back on religiously symbolic and generalised notions of good and evil; 'it is evident that the great mystery of evil is manifesting itself among the German people in awful and unfathomable ways'.[85]

Blanche Dugdale wrote some of the most outspoken and critical articles to feature in the Review during 1945. As a non-Jew, Dugdale had a freedom of expression and a confidence that British Jewish commentators and writers could not have shared. Fearful of being accused of self-interest in a moment of national crisis and moulded by the same 'universalist message of liberalism'[86] that could not account for the specific nature of the persecution, wartime British Jews had come to 'the belief and the policy that it was desirable to let non-Jewish personalities voice concerns regarding Jewry overseas'.[87] The need, Bolchover has argued, 'for third party endorsement was absolutely fundamental to Jewish response to anti-Semitism in general, and to the extermination of the Jews in particular'.[88] The involvement of British non-Jews in the refugee and rescue cause was met with sustained gratitude

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[82] Blanche Dugdale, 'The Camps and their Moral', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[83] ibid.
[84] ibid.
[85] ibid.
[86] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.18.
[87] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.113.
[88] ibid, p.113.

from many in the British Jewish community. That gratitude further limited their ability or willingness to act independently or to question the British government. Thus it was almost always Dugdale who put her name to the Zionist Review's more critical examinations of the actions of the British state in 1945. For example, on 8 June 1945 the Zionist Review included an article by Dugdale entitled 'An Ugly Story.' Her summary of the relationship between those calling for the aid and rescue of Europe's Jews and the British authorities echoed the statements made frequently by Eleanor Rathbone, another non-Jewish spokesperson for the Jews of Europe; 'those who sought admission to the china shop were urged to be careful not to behave like bulls. It was all very plausible, just because so much of it was reasonable, but it all led to so little.'[89] Dugdale shared a similarly realistic approach to the response of the British general public to the news from Europe; 'very likely many a listener switches off the radio, many a reader only skims the column of the newspaper when these atrocities are described'.[90] The British response to liberation, Dugdale argued, could only be understood in light of that negative relationship between the pro-refugee and rescue campaigners and the British Government; 'that being the spirit shown by those who alone could effectively have grappled with the difficulties, it is not odd that when the revelations of what had been going on in the concentration camps in Germany and occupied Europe brought horror and indignation to a new climax, the majority of the British public indulged these feelings without admixture of self-reproach'.[91] Later in August 1945 the Zionist Review did include the remarks of Isaac Gruenbaum of the Palestine Central Rescue Committee that went furthest of all in their direct criticism of Britain and its Allies; 'The non-Jewish world as a whole, and especially the Great Powers must shoulder the responsibility for the annihilation of millions of Jews in Europe. Their indifference encouraged the Nazi murderers to complete their ghastly work.'[92]

During 1945 the Zionist Review appeared to oscillate between a desire to see the specific nature of the Jewish disaster recognised and a universalising tone and choice of language that drew the Jewish experience in Europe within a general tale of human suffering. In an article given the generalised title, 'Crimes Against Humanity' the

[89] Blanche Dugdale, 'An Ugly Story', Zionist Review, 8 June 1945.
[90] Blanche Dugdale, 'The Camps and their Moral', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[91] Blanche Dugdale, 'An Ugly Story', Zionist Review, 8 June 1945.
[92] Isaac Greunbaum, 'Monument to the Victims', Zionist Review, 17 August 1945.

journal nonetheless made clear its belief in the uniqueness of the Nazi treatment of the Jews. The writer was keen to ensure that the Jewish experience should not be 'lumped together with the crimes committed against Russians, Poles, Dutch in one case, or German Marxists and Catholics in the other'.[93] Under another universalising title, 'Man's Inhumanity to Man' an editorial referred to Jews as 'Hitler's first victims'. One correspondent wrote of 'the greatest crime against humanity'. In the same issue the journal commented, 'If the world had appreciated in 1933 that the brutal attacks against the Jews in Germany were a challenge to civilisation, the bloodshed of the last five and a half years may well have been avoided.'[94] In representing the suffering of the Jews as a challenge to civilisation the Zionist Review downplayed the specific nature of their experience in Europe. The uniquely targeted nature of the Nazis' policy that was its driving force was diluted. A look at the journal's editorial titles from April through to September 1945 reveals the same non specific terminology and the use of wide ranging, almost philosophical language and concepts as the writers struggled to make sense of the situation: 'The Voice of Human Conscience', 'Humanity and Common Sense', 'In the Name of Justice', and 'Is this the New World?' Coupled with an approach that distracted the reader from the particularity of the persecution, and indeed from the Jewish identity of its victims, were articles and comments that placed the destruction process within a familiar pattern of Jewish history and of Jewish suffering. On 27 April the Zionist Review's editors commented 'The Jewish people will again stand by the graves of its persecutors....these are great days for the Jewish people. As in the days of old, the persecutors of Jewry are getting their just reward.'[95] Surrounded by the images of the liberated camps and their victims and survivors, the Zionist Review was still able to describe the days of April 1945 as 'great days for the Jewish people'. A picture of unity and of the reassertion of a Jewish identity was painted. The unique elements of the events in Europe in the years before 1945 were diminished. Those events and experiences were incorporated into an historic tale of Jewish redemption against all odds. An undercurrent in the attempt to bring the Nazi persecution into a story of Jewish resilience was a sense that the destruction also fitted a pattern of Jewish martyrdom. Zionist Review articles spoke of 'the Jewish fate' and

[93] Zionist Review, 13 April 1945.
[94] Zionist Review, 20 and 27 April 1945.
[95] 'Victory – What Next?', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.

survivors were recorded as having 'endured their suffering with dignified bearing'.[96] An Army chaplain's report from Buchenwald drew the camp survivors within the same narrative; 'They thank the Almighty for having let them live to see the day of their liberation. Little children, five or six years of age, came up to me saying proudly: "Ich bin a Yid" (I am a Jew).'[97] The symbolism of the young child survivors' assertion of their Jewishness served as a powerful source of reassurance for British Jews in 1945. It was a further opportunity to look to the future. The same account from Buchenwald appeared, almost word for word, in Victor Gollancz's 1945 essay Nowhere to Lay their Heads. In keeping with his literary and personal style, Gollancz went further and drew on religious imagery in his account of the child survivors. As such the story from Buchenwald was grounded both in a powerful historical and a biblical narrative of Jewish resilience; 'And even children five or six years of age had not lost their dignity. Like Jonah going down to Tarshish, they said proudly "Ich bin a Yid" – "I am a Jew." [98]

If 'the specificity of Jewish suffering under the Nazis was incompatible with a measure of universalism, and the collective memory of those events that was forged in the aftermath of the war reflected this conflict', then so too was a conflict over the level of British Jewish wartime response evident in the Zionist Review during 1945.[99] On the one hand, the journal lamented the failure of the majority of society to engage with and recognise the extent of Jewish suffering before 1945. Yet on the other, it seemed to exempt itself and its readers from that failure; 'many still remember the times when the persecution of the Jews was dismissed as atrocity stories; when some organs of the press hardly mentioned the plight of German Jewry; when facts about the concentration camps were suppressed for the sake of Anglo-German friendship'.[100] One correspondent to the journal, Melech Neustadt, did recognise that British Jewish response might have been limited but, like many observers in 1945, he explained that response as the result of the natural inability of decent people to absorb the horrors of Nazi policy; 'until 1942 we did not pay enough heed to the reports reaching us from the Nazi occupied countries, but by then the reports had become too

[96] 'Victory – What Next?', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[97] 'Buchenwald Survivors', Zionist Review, 27 April 1945.
[98] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.5.
[99] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.27.
[100] 'Man's Inhumanity to Man', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.

fearsome for human understanding to grasp'.[101] In September 1945 the journal's editorial shared the frequently heard British response (then and now) that whilst there might have been some information available before 1945, it was only with liberation that they really *knew* what had happened in Europe; 'The picture which has been unfolding before our eyes since the liberation...is terrible. Although horrible reports filtered through to us during the war, the revelations made by the armies of liberation have been a great shock to the Jewish people.'[102] Whilst Bolchover would go on to suggest that the reason for British Jewry's paralysis in the face of the destruction process lay in its own core values, in 1945 Neustadt found the explanation in the scale of the problem and significantly, saw it as a temporary state; 'The sheer horror of the calamity and the vast dimensions of the work to be undertaken seemed to paralyse our people. However, we overcame all that and began work.'[103] There is little sense of a desire to dwell on just what 'all that' constituted. Instead Neustadt was keen to point out all that had been and importantly, what was yet to be achieved; 'We have to offer aid in every shape and form, to seek every possibility, however remote, of offering relief, just as we had previously sought means of delivering people out of the Nazi occupied territories.'[104] Hinting perhaps at what they perceived as a continued lack of clear leadership amongst British Jews in 1945, the paper's editors argued that the 'Jewish man in the street' confronted with the scenes of liberation 'must be told in clear language, where his duty lies'.[105] One contributor wrote of the need for a central organisation to assist those Jewish survivors searching for lost relatives in Europe. He explained the level of disruption that had been caused by the existing large number of overlapping and conflicting groups working in the liberated camps; 'none of them is prepared to forego its own local patriotism for the sake of the whole'.[106] In 1945 the limitations on action posed by disunity were not presented in terms of the past. Nor were they regarded as lost opportunities in the years when the destruction process was ongoing. Instead problems of disunity were remarked upon in relation to the future need for an organised and sustained campaign to help survivors. Criticism of past failings - non-Jewish or Jewish - and a concentrated focus on the future all ensured that any confrontation with the present, with the implications of the scenes of

[101] Melech Neustadt, 'Are Slogans Enough?', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.
[102] 'Rosh Hashanah – 5706', Zionist Review, 7 September 1945.
[103] Melech Neustadt, 'Are Slogans Enough?', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.
[104] ibid.
[105] 'Help for the Survivors', Zionist Review, 13 April 1945.
[106] J.S Taubes, 'Reunion of the Scattered', Zionist Review, 13 April 1945.

liberation for the Jews of Britain could be, if not avoided, then postponed. In asking the questions 'will public opinion now heed the lessons of the murder camps? Will the world at least now understand what the Jews – Hitler's first victims – have gone through in the last ten years?', the publication's editors left little room for the possibility that questions might too have been asked of British Zionist or indeed of all British Jewish action during the war years.[107]

In 1945 Victor Gollancz reviewed his work on behalf of the Jews of Europe, 'I mention things I have published and written myself because, at such a moment as this, to recall that one has at least done something helps a little to assuage the pain of having done so little.'[108] In the aftermath of liberation British Jews were caught between a need for the comfort and reassurance that an account of their communal and charitable activities in response to the European disaster promised and their struggle to understand why those efforts, tried and tested in the past, seemed somehow to have fallen short this time. The provision of what often amounted to lists of the activities of British Jewish communal and charitable organisations illustrated the consistent insecurity of the British Jewish community. In 1945 that insecure community was surrounded by the unshakeable moral confidence of a victorious British nation. The title of Norman Bentwich's survey of British Jewish refugee work is perhaps illustrative of a need in the aftermath of 1945 to detail just what British Jews had achieved in the face of the crisis. Written in 1956 to mark the 300th anniversary of the resettlement of the Jews in England, They Found Refuge: An Account of British Jewry's work for Victims of Nazi Oppression included an introduction by supporter of the refugee cause Viscount Samuel. Samuel explained, 'This book has been prepared...to tell the story of what was done, by British Jews, over a period of more than twenty years, for the rescue and rehabilitation of hundreds of thousands of the victims of the Nazi persecution. It is a poignant story; but consoling also as a tale of devoted human service.'[109] For Samuel and Bentwich, unlike for Gollancz, the consolation to be found in the record of British Jewish action was neither fleeting nor simply indicative of a greater fatal apathy. Rather Bentwich's 'account' served as an 'authentic record of these tragic events, and of the way in

[107] 'Man's Inhumanity to Man', Zionist Review, 20 April 1945.
[108] Victor Gollancz, What Buchenwald Really Means, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1945), p.2.
[109] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge: An Account of British Jewry's Work for Victims of Nazi Oppression, (The Cresset Press, London, 1956). Introduction by Viscount Samuel, pp.xi-xii.

which they were faced' necessary if 'in some degree, the human character, which had been so deeply injured and disgraced' is to be 'vindicated'.[110] Whilst the study was dedicated to Jewish activities, according to its authors it was the human character as a whole that ultimately needed to be vindicated. A sense of gratitude and a need to express that sentiment to both those Jews and non-Jews active in the refugee cause formed the basis of They Found Refuge. Samuel listed the contribution of the non-Jewish statesmen and organisations involved in refugee work. This was followed by a statement on the contribution made 'in return' to the nation by grateful refugees; '10,000 of the refugees eagerly joined the British forces in the war; many others became producers on the land, or munition workers; and scientists, doctors and technicians made their special contributions.'[111] They Found Refuge covered the work of refugee organisations from 1933 until the 1950s. Yet a noticeable emphasis on Germany and the German Jewish refugees of the 1930s remained; 'The persecution of Jews in Germany was to prove, during the next decade, more terrible than any which had preceded.'[112] Brought up in the 'pervasive Zionist atmosphere' of his London home, educated at Cambridge and trained as a lawyer, Norman Bentwich was a central figure in the refugee and rescue cause.[113] He was at the heart of British Jewish response to the destruction process. He later described himself as 'the chronicler of what refugees did and what was done for them'.[114] Writing in 1961 he recalled the extent of the 'new major activity' that he had undertaken 'at the age of fifty': 'For two and half years I was deputy of the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany, then for five years the Honorary Director of the (Jewish) Council for German Jewry, after that vice-chairman of the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad.'[115] Before returning to London in 1929, Bentwich had served as the first Attorney General after the establishment of the Mandate in Palestine. He was made Professor of International Relations at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in 1932. Travelling extensively on refugee work, including to Germany, Bentwich had seen 'the relentless deterioration of Jewish conditions' in that country in the months

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[110] Viscount Samuel in Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, p.xi.
[111] ibid, p.xii.
[112] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, p.7.
[113] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years: An Account of My Life and Times, (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1961), p.15.
[114] ibid, p.122.
[115] ibid, p.122.

before the Second World War.[116] Bentwich described the advent of Nazism as 'the gravest challenge ever to Anglo-Jewry and to the Jewish communities of the world'. With the destruction process cast in terms of its universal impact on European progress and learning, the challenge ('gravest' of all, of course, for Europe's Jews) was all the more shocking because it had come from 'a citadel of European civilisation' and 'a principal centre of Jewish learning'.[117] In 1945 Bentwich returned to Germany and visited Bergen Belsen. Two years later he also visited Dachau. He attended the Belsen Trial and, like many in Britain in 1945, was horrified by the female Nazi guards in the camp, not least by the woman who remains at the centre of Britain's memory of Belsen; 'The most distressing case was the glamorous girl, Irma Greiser, who had done some dreadful deeds, and was sentenced to death.'[118] Bentwich struggled to reconcile the 'glamorous girl' with the facts of Belsen. Bentwich's Zionism and his belief that the national home represented 'the antithesis of Hitlerism', was evident in his recollection of his visit to Belsen.[119] Of the Jewish survivors who remained in Belsen after its liberation, Bentwich wrote; 'They were terribly crowded, their rations of food were meagre, they had no productive occupation; but they were intensely alive. They had not survived six years of horror for nothing, and they felt themselves the heirs of five million martyrs.'[120] Like the contributors to the Zionist Review who had visited survivors in liberated concentration camps, Bentwich was to note that in Belsen in 1945 'the persistent demand of the overwhelming majority was to open the gates of Palestine'.[121] Once more the idea of the new state allowed the destruction process to be drawn within a redemptive narrative of Jewish history so that the World Jewish Congress's Nahum Goldmann could look back on the 'unique epoch which witnessed its greatest tragedy in the Nazi period and its greatest fulfilment in the creation of Israel'.[122] The appendices to They Found Refuge included lists of the major refuge and rescue organisations established by Anglo-Jewry and of the names of those involved in the work. Evidence perhaps of Bentwich's own focus on the future and of his belief that a new national homeland represented the revival of the Jewish people, the names of those involved in refugee work who had subsequently

[116] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.144.
[117] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, p.7.
[118] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.285.
[119] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.140.
[120] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.284.
[121] ibid, p.284.
[122] Nahum Goldmann, 'Foreword' in Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs, p.14.

'migrated to Israel' were marked with a star.[123] In his autobiography, My 77 Years, Bentwich was to conclude that 'The most striking contribution of Anglo-Jewry in this dramatic period of Jewish history has been to the establishment of the Jewish nation in the Land of Israel.'[124]

The lack of unity that is often pointed to by historians as the cause of the limited nature of British Jewish response to the Holocaust was certainly a sensitive issue for those British Jews writing and remembering in 1945 and afterwards. Bentwich did go as far as to hint at the hard work needed to achieve a degree of unison in the British Jewish community during the crisis; 'It was not easy, and it was no small achievement, to get this unity of approach, and to avoid the endemic trouble of duplication in Jewish philanthropic efforts at times of great emergency and public emotion.'[125] However he remained keen to counter any suggestion that British Jews had been beset by disunity and, like many British Jewish writers in the immediate aftermath of the war, Bentwich continued to offer explanations and justifications for the community's behaviour; 'the whole community was united; there was not Zionist or anti-Zionist, Orthodox or Reform or Liberal. The common responsibility to help in rescue was accepted.'[126] The memoirs of Selig Brodetsky, Zionist wartime President of the Board of Deputies and executive member of the Council for Christians and Jews, were also testament to that concern regarding unity in the British Jewish community.[127]

Brodetsky's autobiography was completed in 1954 and published posthumously in 1960. Naturally his writing focused on his own personal activities and contribution, often reading simply as a list of his achievements and opinions - although it is perhaps also important to note that, as Israel Finestein has commented, Brodetsky 'wrote his recollections of a sometimes turbulent life, at a time when illness was upon him. His old vigour had gone. There was an element of bitterness and disillusion.'[128] Brodetsky

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[123] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, Appendices, pp.208-215.
[124] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.333.
[125] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, p.20.
[126] ibid, p.14.
[127] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs.
[128] Israel Finestein, 'Selig Brodetsky (1888-1954): The Prodigy from Fashion Street', in Israel Finestein, Scenes and Personalities in Anglo-Jewry 1800-2000, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2002), p.228.

was, according to Finestein, 'the first genuinely popular hero on a national scale' amongst the Anglo-Jewish community.[129] Born in the Ukraine and brought up in London's East End immigrant Jewish community, Brodetsky was also educated at Cambridge, one of those whom Bentwich would call 'young leaders' for the East End's 'cultural aspirations'.[130] Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Brodetsky combined multiple community commitments with his academic career. President of the Board during perhaps one of the most turbulent times in its own history and British Jewish communal leader as the destruction in Europe reached its peak, his responses are revealing. In a chapter entitled Jewish Extermination Brodetsky commented in his memoirs; 'one is often reduced to despair by the lack of discipline in Jewish life'.[131] The causes for such struggles with unity, Brodetsky argued, were very 'often for prestige reasons, not because of any real difference of opinion'.[132] Making his own barely veiled criticism of those in the British Jewish community with whom he himself came into conflict, Brodetsky noted; 'British ministers are polite, but it was indicated to me at the Foreign Office that all these multiple approaches confused them.'[133] Brodetsky's criticism of the Anglo-Jewish Association for example (whose responses to 1945 are considered below) was still accompanied by a more than generous explanation of British Foreign Office officials' attitude to European Jews – and to British Jews. Brodetsky's memoirs illustrated the sensitive nature of the British Jewish community's relationship with the government. Unwilling to criticise the already legendary wartime leader, Brodetsky, in a now oft-quoted remark, recalled that Churchill had turned down a deputation from the Jewish community during 1942 because he 'was understandably too busy to deal with it himself'.[134] Brodetsky was present at the meeting in early 1943 that led to the formation of the National Committee for Rescue. He records the group's title as the National Committee for the Relief of Victims from Nazi Terror. However, although present at the meeting, he was not involved with the Committee's later work. Brodetsky wrote that Eleanor Rathbone's suggestion at that meeting that approaches should be made to Hitler to let the Jews leave meant 'some of us were dubious about this, except perhaps if the

[129] Israel Finestein, 'Selig Brodetsky', p.228.
[130] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.21.
[131] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs, p.229.
[132] ibid, p.244.
[133] ibid, p.230.
[134] ibid, p.221.

United Nations did it as a whole'.[135] The Jewish representatives' response to Rathbone suggests their continued sensitivity to the potential accusation of particularism and their cautiousness about acting alone. Whilst Brodetsky noted that 'the need for a token gesture by Britain was emphasised' at the meeting, it is doubtful that (the non-Jewish) Rathbone would have settled for any such British 'token gestures'.[136] When Brodetsky did comment on the British government's attitude towards Jewish refugees and their rescue, anything that might be deemed critical often related to the British policy in Palestine; 'the British government decided only to use some remaining Palestine immigration certificates for Bulgarian Jews...there was no change in the White Paper policy, no change in regard to the admission of more refugees into Britain'.[137] Whilst Brodetsky wrote that during the war his 'main concern was to do something to save Jews from the Nazi hell',[138] the parts of his memoir dealing with wartime were themselves dedicated to an account of the post war planning that had occupied the Jewish leadership as the disaster in Europe unfolded. Much of that related to the formation of a new national Jewish homeland and indeed for many Jewish organisations the two subjects 'ultimately merged into one'.[139] Brodetsky's own Zionism was based on the belief that 'a national home for the Jews was an historical necessity, and plain justice'.[140] He was a member of the executive of the World Zionist Organisation and had also been an executive member of the Council for German Jewry from 1936. He sat on the council of The Central British Fund for Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation from 1946. Brodetsky explained his Zionism as 'an interpretation of Jewish life, with all that would help the Jewish people to survive'. Illustrating perhaps the complexity of British Jewish politics, he reminded readers of his memoirs that 'it must not be thought that I was a Jewish nationalist in any narrow sense'.[141]

Turning to the events in Europe, Brodetsky explained; 'We still did not realise the terrible extent of the annihilation of the Jewish populations in Europe carried out systematically and in cold blood by the Nazis, till it all came out at the Nuremberg

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[135] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs, p.223.
[136] ibid, p.223.
[137] ibid, p.225.
[138] ibid, p. 221.
[139] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.136.
[140] Israel Finestein, 'Selig Brodetsky', pp. 230-231.
[141] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs, p.124.

Trials.'[142] However, he pointed out that in 1942 those in the British Jewish leadership 'had known, even though not to the full extent, the kind of barbarism by which the millions of Jews in Europe were being wiped out of existence'.[143] Brodetsky later made a visit to the Displaced Person's camp at Bergen Belsen. He also recalled how he had 'got a horrifying reminder of what these poor people had endured when I saw a documentary film in London showing the death camp of Oswiecim; it looked like a city...there were five huge ovens, in which thousands of victims a day had been burned'.[144] It may be worthy of comment that in his brief summary of Brodetsky's life, Israel Finestein made no direct reference to Brodetsky's response, personal or public, to the Holocaust. Rather once again the events in Europe seem to exist at the margins, both of Brodetsky's life and the account of it, concealed by non-specific words and phrases. Brodetsky is described as holding office at the Board during 'an epoch of great stress'.[145] His character is defined as one belonging to those British Jews from 'an age gone beyond retrieve' when 'few foresaw the catastrophe that was to come' and when 'none could foretell its magnitude'.[146] His writing was also further evidence of the extent to which the disaster in Europe had existed alongside numerous internal concerns for British Jewry – and how, for Brodetsky himself, it had coexisted with the speeches, meetings, and travelling that his work as Professor of Mathematics at the University of Leeds also demanded. Notably, in discussing his employer's flexibility in response to the demands of his Zionist work, Brodetsky remarked; 'My personal relations with British people have always made me marvel at their extraordinary tolerance and decency.'[147]

In telling the 'whole noble and often dramatic story' of Britain and its Jewish community's response to the Nazi persecution, Norman Bentwich, perhaps conscious of the anniversary the publication of They Found Refuge marked, also offered positive (perhaps what Pamela Shatzkes might call 'naïve') explanations for the actions of the British state during the years of Nazi rule; 'Like all countries in Europe, England in the Thirties was suffering from the world economic crisis, and felt unable

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[142] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs, p.218.
[143] ibid, p.218.
[144] ibid, p.248.
[145] Israel Finestein, 'Selig Brodetsky', p. 232.
[146] ibid, p.229.
[147] Selig Brodetsky, Memoirs, p.121.

to admit aliens who might become a charge on public funds.'[148] In a conclusion that certainly illustrated a pointed expression of gratitude to Britain, Bentwich cast Britain's response to the refugee crisis in terms of what he saw as the country's natural and historically proven generosity; 'England, from the dawn of her history, has built up her culture by the admission of groups of teachers, scholars and artists from the Continent of Europe. The asylum she has given in the last twenty years to the Jewish and other refugees from persecution is an example of continuous progress; and the full harvest of her generosity has still to be reaped.'[149] 'The English people', Bentwich remarked, 'responded to the call of humanity... and have had a full reward for their loyalty to the tradition of "the sacred refuge for mankind."'[150] The word Britain was once more replaced with England and those who had left for Israel had prepared 'in the English towns and countryside'.[151] It is perhaps noteworthy that in a later account Bentwich was less overtly positive about the British state response to refugees during 1933. In making his own particular use of the island motif, Bentwich had still noted that for Jewish refugees; 'The island shores of England could not be so easily penetrated.'[152] In the epilogue to They Found Refuge we find a phrase that, it seems, is never far from any discussion of Allied response to the Jewish disaster. On one side of his own 'Balance Sheet' Bentwich recorded the intellectual and cultural benefits bestowed upon the British Jewish community by the refugees. On the other, and again providing apparently still much needed evidence of British Jewish relief efforts, Bentwich outlined the contribution made by the British Jewish community. It is significant that more than ten years after the liberation of the concentration camps, Bentwich still considered the most important and noteworthy contribution of British Jews to be their financial and philanthropic one; 'The community subscribed to public appeals over £5,000,000. As much was given by individuals who were responsible for the maintenance of relations and friends.'[153] Bentwich was keen to point out how British Jews made a sustained contribution under trying circumstances; 'The effort of the community was sustained for over twenty years, and that at a period of national

[148] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, p.16. Commenting on his 1956 work Pamela Shatzkes has said of Bentwich; 'He believed that Anglo-Jewry did everything possible, that most refugees who came to Britain were satisfied with their treatment by the refugee organisations and the conduct of individuals such as Otto Schiff was exemplary.' Pamela Shatzkes, Holocaust and Rescue, p.2.
[149] Norman Bentwich, They Found Refuge, p.206.
[150] ibid, p.206.
[151] ibid, p.207.
[152] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.125.
[153] ibid, p.206.

crisis, when the burden of taxation was heaviest.'[154] For Bentwich, British Jewry's 'full reward for its loyalty to the tradition of Jewish brotherhood' was to be found not only in the rescue of refugees or in the lives of the 'citizens of Israel' but also in the solidarity between 'Jew and Christian' in Britain that the response to the destruction process had, he believed, proved.[155] The familiar relationship between gratitude, generosity, loyalty and balance sheets once more determined the contents of a British Jewish attempt to bring the disaster in Europe under control.

In the foreword to his May 1945 essay Nowhere to Lay Their Heads; The Jewish Tragedy in Europe and its Solution, described by the Zionist Review as 'a challenge to the conscience of Britain',[156] Victor Gollancz informed his readers; 'The sections of this pamphlet which refer to Palestine are quite 'unofficial.' I am not a member of any Zionist organisation, nor should it be assumed that the views I express on this question, or on any part of it, are necessarily identical with those held by the majority of Zionists.'[157] Gollancz's words may be testament to the differences and divisions in British Jewish life during the 1930s and 1940s. He also alluded to the reaction that Zionism generated in the wider British world; 'I am well aware that some who have read so far with sympathy will, at the very mention of Palestine, suffer a reaction. 'International politics' will come leaping into their thoughts, or 'the Arab question.'[158] However his response to the liberation of the concentration camps would have much in common with those recorded in the Zionist Review. In 1961 Norman Bentwich wrote of Gollancz that 'He had a genius for words and a genius for organisation, and a genius from passing from cause to cause.'[159] Bentwich had worked with Gollancz in the formation of the Jewish Society for Human Service in response to the suffering of refugees in Palestine in 1948.[160] He described Gollancz as 'a most stimulating, but in some ways difficult' colleague who always sought 'something which would strike the public imagination'.[161] Gollancz, Richard Bolchover reminds us, 'was undoubtedly

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[154] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.206.
[155] ibid, p.206.
[156] Zionist Review, 29 June 1945.
[157] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, Foreword.
[158] ibid, p.15.
[159] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.226.
[160] Papers detailing the work of the society and letters between Gollancz and Bentwich are held as part of the collection of Bentwich's papers at Warwick University. (Jewish Society for Human Service, MS 157/3/JS, Norman Bentwich Papers, Warwick University Archives).
[161] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.226.

influenced by many more intellectual currents than most in the British Jewish community'. Furthermore, 'his relationship with Judaism and the community's socio-political philosophy was certainly unconventional'.[162] Gollancz, as we have seen, had also shown perhaps a deeper and more profound personal engagement with the situation in Europe than many in Britain, Jewish or non-Jewish – born perhaps of what Bentwich identified as 'an ability to project himself into a cause with complete identification'.[163] If anything that might be called a representative example of British Jewish response to the destruction process could be identified, then it is unlikely that we would find it in Gollancz. And yet, Gollancz's 1945 publications were to illustrate the same focus on the future, the same accounts of lost opportunities and the same complex response to the situation in Europe that was created by a relationship with Britishness. A complicated individual at once part of community life and yet one whose views were often distinct from the mainstream of British Jewish society, Gollancz's writing represents another window on the diversity of British Jewish responses to the destruction process.

In an essay infused at every level with symbolic representations of Englishness, Gollancz struggled to avoid allowing his responses to 1945 and to the liberation of the camps to become solely accounts of past failings and of lost chances for the rescue and aid of European Jews. Recalling the short-lived nature of the British response to the Allied Declaration of December 1942 he commented 'the memory is a bitter one. So it and must be; but I don't want to be bitter about it'.[164] In their survey of the consequences of Allied inaction, the content of the following paragraphs certainly suggested otherwise. Gollancz's writing illustrated a greater degree of detail regarding the nature of the extermination policy than the shorter and often more generalised articles in the Zionist Review; 'Of the 31,000 prisoners, for instance, liberated at Dachau, over 3000 were Jews from all over Europe. In a half unloaded train at the gates were the remnants of a transport of 4000 internees who had started on foot from Auschwitz in the middle of winter...'[165] His attempts to describe the process still often shared the same phraseology as he wrote of 'these barbarities' and of 'an evil so awful'. Attempts to place the destruction process within a pattern of Jewish history

[162] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.19.
[163] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.225.
[164] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.1.
[165] ibid, p.4.

that, Dan Stone has argued, meant it 'lost its qualitatively new character',[166] may also be traceable in Gollancz's 1945 work; 'And now remember that this, though the most horrible episode in Jewish history, is not an isolated one. Ever since the Dispersion Jewish history in Europe has been, with some bright intervals and many episodes of gentile friendliness to Jews, one long record of persecution and insult.'[167] Gollancz mapped out Jewish suffering from the Crusades to Hitler and connected the two; 'The Crusades of the Middle Ages were accompanied throughout Europe by anti-Jewish excesses as evil and almost as widespread, if not as scientific, as Hitler's.'[168] If the destruction process could be read as part of a familiar, an awful but a familiar pattern, then that pattern at least offered the possibility of an explanation for the present.

In 1945 the Board of Deputies had published its own response to the situation in Europe, The Jews in Europe: Their Martyrdom and their Future.[169] Dividing the 'progressive tragedy' of European Jewry into four phases beginning with 'Disillusionment' and 'Persecution' to 'Extermination' and finally 'Liberation', the emphasis again moved from the contributions made by Jews during the war to the future for the Jewish people as a whole; 'the terrible price that the Jewish people has had to pay in this war, in which over one million of its sons and thousands of its daughters have taken an active and valiant share, entitles it to a sympathetic and generous attitude on the part of the Powers'.[170] Stone has argued that the papers of the Board in the months and years after 1945 illustrate a particular 'emotional detachment'.[171] Whilst The Jews in Europe might have been presented in a rather detached, business like manner and dealt with such technical issues as 'Restitution and Compensation' and the 'Naturalisation of Refugees', the emotional impact of the destruction process was evident throughout. The pamphlet's considerable detail regarding the development of the extermination policy was accompanied by a struggle to find adequate language and an acceptance that 'the full story of the war of extermination may not be known for months, if even then'.[172] The publication was

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[166] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.23.
[167] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.18.
[168] ibid, p.19.
[169] The Board of Deputies of British Jews, The Jews in Europe -Their Martyrdom and their Future, (The Board of Deputies of British Jews, London, 1945).
[170] ibid, p.52.
[171] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.25.
[172] The Board of Deputies of British Jews, The Jews in Europe, p.37.

full of highly charged and increasingly emotional terminology: 'the dreadful pall of a colossal catastrophe', a campaign of terrorism', 'barbarism and gangsterism'.[173] The Board conceded that 'to give anything like an adequate account of this monstrous campaign of barbarism, which increased in unprecedented savagery until it culminated in a succession of wholesale massacres, would need a large volume'.[174] Arguably the division of the chapter dealing with 'Extermination 1939-1945' into parts – 'Pogroms in Poland', 'Massacres in the Ukraine' or 'Robbery, Arson and Sacrilege' for example, prevented any real understanding of the whole extermination policy. Even contained in the same volume, the Board's division of the events in Europe ensured that the facts retained the same disconnectedness that had been created by much of the British press reporting regarding Nazi treatment of the Jews.

In The Jews in Europe references to 'massacres' and to 'atrocities' also had the same effect. The Board had stated clearly that, 'In all the annals of human wickedness since the beginning of time there is no parallel to this record of colossal slaughter, wholly unprovoked, deliberately planned, methodically organised and scientifically executed.'[175] And yet, references to 'pogroms', 'barbarism and butchery' and to 'the savagery of the Huns' cast the Nazi persecution and the Jewish suffering in historical terms, conjuring images of the past that seemed to undermine any attempt to represent the unprecedented nature of the Final Solution.[176] As with so many British responses to the scenes of 1945, the Board's publication shared the same emphasis on the actions of the perpetrators. Again 'Germans' and 'Nazis' were used interchangeably. Descriptions of the Nazis emphasised their perceived otherworldliness and evil. With 'maleficent power' the 'Germans' committed 'ghoulish atrocities'; they made 'satanic inventions,' they 'hurled themselves upon the Jews with demoniac fury', 'but Hitler's sadistic lust was not sated'.[177] Hitler was often presented in symbolic or religious terminology as a Devil like figure on a 'satanic crusade', followed by 'countless apostles'.[178] The Nazis' anti-Jewish policy was regarded as a failure of German

[173] The Board of Deputies of British Jews, The Jews in Europe, p.3, p.15 and p.16.
[174] ibid, p.24.
[175] ibid, p.34.
[176] ibid, p.27.
[177] ibid, p.33, p.24, p.31, and p.14.
[178] ibid, pp.14-15.

civilisation; 'The Germans abandoned all pretensions to being civilised in an orgy of pillage and murder, of torture and sadism, of vandalism and sacrilege.' [179]

The advent of Nazism and the war itself were also represented as the failure of mankind as a whole to move forward. The hope that the end of the First World War would mean 'that civilisation would go forward on the road of progress and international amity, and that Jews would gradually share in the blessings that might be in store for the rest of humanity' had been dashed.[180] Palestine and the formation of the national home were once more represented as the antidote to the Jewish situation in Europe. The first point in the Board's section dealing with 'Liberation 1943-45' was entitled 'Seeking Asylum in Palestine.' It is noteworthy that whilst the publication did state that the Allied Declaration had 'failed to produce the least effect'[181] on the German government, the closest it would come to any comment on the actions of the British government was in relation to the White Paper policy. Some European Jews had made 'determined efforts to save themselves' but 'unfortunately most of them were foiled by the White Paper of 1939, which imposed severe restrictions upon Jewish immigration'.[182] The Board's references to Britain were limited to calls for the granting of citizenship to refugees and to providing the proof of 'their fitness' to belong. Refugees in Britain 'have established a particularly good record' and the publication provided a list of their economic, academic and military contributions to Britain.[183] Finally, the disaster in Europe was drawn into a continued narrative of Jewish suffering and the Board's attention turned to the possibilities for the creation of a new national Jewish identity; 'In the measureless martyrdom that they have had to endure, their chief solace is the hope that now, after these years of slaughter, when the settlement comes, they will experience the great act of historic repatriation for which they have yearned and prayed throughout the centuries.'[184] Narratives of history and of the past, of human development, progress and suffering were all drawn upon in a British Jewish search for cognitive control.

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[179] The Board of Deputies of British Jews, The Jews in Europe, p.24.
[180] ibid, p.3.
[181] ibid, p.33.
[182] ibid, p.38.
[183] ibid, p.57.
[184] ibid, p.64.

Victor Gollancz, like many British Jewish writers, not only attempted to place the events in Europe within a narrative of Jewish history but also saw the Nazis' policies as evidence of the failure of the Enlightenment and thus of humankind's development. In this context the much sought after meaning of the destruction process was found in the symbolic and universalised concept of the failure of man's progress; 'the Enlightenment is all but extinguished: the darkness of our own day has succeeded it: and the massacre of four million Jews is the very symbol of its passing'.[185] A search for the *meaning* of the destruction process both occupied British Jewish thinking and in some cases served to distance the specifically Jewish nature of the suffering in Europe. The destruction of European Jewry was represented as the indicator, the symptom of a wider problem and as a result its individual scale and significance was reduced. For example, in 1946 The Anglo-Jewish Association's pamphlet The Future of European Jewry went as far as to comment 'This is not a Jewish problem: it is a problem that the world must face, if it is to save itself. As long as Jews are denied equal treatment, then democracy and freedom generally are in danger.'[186] The Anglo-Jewish Association was founded in 1871. Its focus lay in the aid and protection of Jews abroad and 'in promoting the social, moral and intellectual progress of the Jews'.[187] Many of the wealthy families of the established British Jewish community were members and the Association's 'prestige derived from this factor'.[188] The Anglo-Jewish Association's leaders had played a central part as the conflict over Zionism, its definition and meaning for British Jewry had reached a peak in the early 1940s. Not anti-Zionist, its members had always argued that Palestine should be opened to Jewish immigration and that the country should be developed as a place in which Jews could settle. They did not however regard Palestine or a new national state as the only place for successful Jewish settlement. Neither did they automatically consider either as the only solution for those Jewish survivors of the Nazi persecution. As such the Anglo-Jewish Association was often criticised for representing not only non-Zionist views, but also solely those of the established British Jewish families who made up its membership. Much of that criticism came from those in the self styled Zionist Caucus who eventually secured a majority on the Board in 1943. In response

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[185] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.19.
[186] Anglo-Jewish Association with a prefatory note by Leonard Stein, The Future of European Jewry, (Anglo-Jewish Association, London, 1946), p.13.
[187] Anglo-Jewish Association Constitution, 1871.
[188] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.26.

to Caucus attempts to remove its members from the Board's Joint Foreign Committee that had until then represented British Jewry's communal response regarding Jews abroad, the Anglo-Jewish Association set up its own committee. As the destruction process in Europe continued, the two groups battled to be considered the true representative body for British Jews in the matters that impacted on Jewish life abroad. The Anglo-Jewish Association, Richard Bolchover has commented 'eventually became the refuge of most of those outside the Zionist Caucus', many of whom nevertheless still considered themselves to be 'Zionists'.[189]

In 1946 The Anglo-Jewish Association's The Future of European Jewry attempted to outline the geographical and numerical status of the remainder of Europe's Jews. In comparison to the language evident in the Board of Deputies' The Jews in Europe, the Anglo-Jewish Association's publication took a considerably controlled and restrained approach to detailing the state of Europe's Jews; 'For how many of Europe's present Jewish population is there a future worthy of the name in Europe? In the last analysis, the answer must lie with Europe's Jews themselves.'[190] There was an element of the practical approach from the outset as the Prefatory Note commented, 'it is believed that these papers will be found of interest to all who desire to have in handy form an outline both of the present position of European Jewry and of the questions which affect its future'.[191] Whilst the publication recognised that the numbers of Jews who would want to remain in Europe would be small, the emphasis was still on the help and assistance that British Jews could offer in the face of 'the problems concerning Europe'.[192] Detailed sections of the publication were reserved for the discussion of the 'Restitution and Compensation' necessary for the recovery of European Jewry. On a list of the 'Problems of European Communities' only the sixth and final point read 'Finally must come Migration, which in practice can only be considered in the light of the solution of the Palestine question.'[193] Unlike many of the British Jewish responses assessed in this chapter, the Anglo-Jewish Association's publication did not dedicate considerable space to Palestine; 'The special problems connected with the future of Jewish immigration to Palestine do not come within the scope of the present

[189] Ricahrd Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.34.
[190] The Anglo-Jewish Association, The Future of European Jewry, p.8.
[191] ibid, Prefatory Note.
[192] ibid, p.13.
[193] ibid, p.15.

discussion.'[194] The publication referred readers instead to the Anglo-Jewish Association's memorandum to the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry in which the Association had stated that there was 'no genuine alternative' to a concentrated focus on Palestine.[195] The Association, in keeping with the views of its members, did not present the creation of a new Jewish state as a singular solution to the problems facing the remnant of European Jewry. For example, even if a Jewish State might end Jewish statelessness, then 'this solution depends upon such a number of variable possibilities that it would be dangerous to trust it alone. Nor would it prove the problem of statelessness as a whole'.[196] With a British Jewish membership whose roots lay in 'a philosophy of denationalising Jewry'[197], in 1946 the Anglo-Jewish Association concluded that 'It is not in the interests of humanity and of European civilisation that human beings should be subjected..... to the treatment which European Jews have suffered in the last decade.....it is in the interests of justice for all that the wrongs done to the Jews in Europe be rectified and all possible indemnification be made.'[198] Retaining a focus on practical aid for the suffering in Europe, but placing that suffering itself within a universal context of the need for 'justice for all', the Anglo-Jewish Association's response proves the need to account for the individuality of British Jewish or non-Jewish attempts to react to and understand the destruction process. Following a pattern evident throughout his writing, Victor Gollancz's own search for 'cognitive control' would once more centralise his understanding of British identity.

Victor Gollancz had wondered if the destruction process represented the failure of the Enlightenment. His one exception to that belief was to be found in Britain and the British Empire: 'Perhaps the Enlightenment will not vanish everywhere. I dare to trust that in this beloved island, which with one or two other countries is the hope of the world, it may still survive, and that Britain and her Dominions may yet conquer the world with a doctrine of mercy and kindness, of charity and toleration.'[199] In one of many references to Romantic and iconic English poets in Nowhere to Lay their Heads, Gollancz hoped that the words of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind might be

[194] The Anglo-Jewish Association, The Future of European Jewry, p.21.
[195] ibid, p.22.
[196] ibid, p.34.
[197] Richard Bolchover, British Jewry and the Holocaust, p.32.
[198] The Anglo-Jewish Association, The Future of European Jewry, p.12.
[199] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.19.

applicable to Britain's future role in the world – 'ashes and sparks, (her) words among mankind.' The words of the poem are also connected to Gollancz and other British Jewish writing in 1945 in that they conjure images of new beginnings, share an emphasis on the future, on a kind of redemption and a reassuring continuity. For example, the final lines of the stanza from which Gollancz quoted read, 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?' Gollancz's use of these lines in relation to Britain suggests a particularly romanticised or emotional perception of the country that, whilst always evident in his writing throughout his involvement in the refugee and rescue cause, seemed somehow particularly intense in 1945.[200]

Having always understood the specific nature of Jewish suffering under the Nazis, in 1945 Gollancz argued that the situation of Jews in the liberated camps required particular attention and dedicated the contents of his May 1945 essay to the subject alone; 'the problem of the Jewish fate, as reviewed in the light of the last twelve years, has its own special characteristics, which cannot be ignored'.[201] However, in feeling it necessary to explain the specific nature of the essay's subject material, Gollancz betrayed a sensitivity to the reactions and responses of his British audience that suggests a long term balancing act between Jewish and British identity. In the foreword to his essay, he wrote 'It may be necessary to forestall a criticism, which could be based on a misunderstanding. The whole of this pamphlet deals, and is intended to deal, exclusively with Jews. If anyone imagines that this deliberate limitation implies a lack of sympathy with other sufferers....he is imagining something which is wholly untrue.'[202] Even amongst those who had campaigned for the Jewish plight to be recognised, the attention it received still, it seemed, needed to be explained in 1945.

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[200] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.19. With reference to Percy Shelley, Ode to the West Wind, (1819) The full text of the stanza from which Gollancz quoted reads;
'Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth,
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind,
Be through my lips to unawakened earth,
The trumpet of a prophecy!
O wind,
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?'
[201] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, Foreword.
[202] ibid.

In the conclusion to his piece, Gollancz was once again to hint at the legacy of a British Jewish fear of particularism and perhaps of the perceived need for a non-Jewish contribution that Richard Bolchover has identified; 'Lest this praise should be considered worthless, as coming from a Jew, let me end by quoting the testimony of a gentile writer.'[203] Throughout the piece Gollancz's previous natural boldness in his account of the persecution and in his demand that the unique facts of Jewish suffering be recognised were curtailed. Self-conscious references to British wartime experiences and a particular representation of the British national character suggested Gollancz himself was not immune to the patriotic atmosphere of Britain in the spring of 1945. Gollancz clearly stated; 'The plain fact is that, relative to their total number, the Jews have suffered in this war more, terribly more, than any other people in the world.' He continued however, 'I would not say a word which might seem to make light of British suffering, and in particular of British suffering during the period when, in the phrase which must never be allowed to lose its glory however often repeated, "we stood alone." [204] Gollancz was tentative about the notion of degrees of suffering. However a comparison between that of the Jews and of the British people still allowed for a comment on the resilience of the British character; 'In Britain, even at the moment when all seemed lost, there was still a sort of quiet refusal to lose hope.'[205] The meaningless of Jewish suffering in Europe meant that 'they couldn't feel, as bombarded London could feel, that, frightened though they might be, there was still some happiness and glory about sharing in the common peril'.[206]

Concerned in this and other publications throughout 1945 to ensure the British people understood the fact that not all Germans were Nazis, Gollancz reminded his readers that German Jewish refugees in Britain had 'a personal anxiety, from which we are exempt'.[207] To aid that process of understanding however, he also needed to draw the refugee experience within that of the British people as a whole, to connect it to a British wartime narrative already fixed in the minds of the British people: 'try to enter for a moment into their feelings during this summer of 1945. They share our rejoicing

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[203] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p. 32.
[204] ibid, p.2.
[205] ibid, p.2.
[206] ibid, p.2.
[207] ibid, p.7.

at the victory over Hitler's fascists, which is as much theirs as it is ours.'[208] Britishness, or in this case, Englishness specifically, was equally present in his attitude to the German people and to the impact that Nazism had made on Germany itself. Remarking on the German Jewish refugees' sorrow for their lost German homeland and writing against the grain of contemporary British opinion, Gollancz argued that there were those who also shared a sadness at the damage done to German culture, to 'Kant, and Bach, and the trumpet-call of Florestran's deliverance' – but once again, it was the words of 'the most English of poets' that Gollancz used to make the point, quoting the final lines of William Wordsworth's 1802 poem, On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic.[209] The Britishness that Gollancz believed had been threatened by state policy and inaction during the destruction process remained central to his response to 1945, this time coloured by the emotional patriotism of the liberation year; 'if one thing more than any other marks Britain out for a great destiny in the coming time....it is that in the midst of the greatest peril that has ever threatened us we preserved in such high degree those essential liberties without which life is either a paradise for slaves or an intolerable burden.'[210] His interpretation of British liberalism that had shaped his activities as a National Committee for Rescue member was now the reason behind his belief that German Jewish refugees needed to be granted British citizenship, the 'only one course of action worthy of British traditions and of the liberal humanitarianism which it will be the British privilege to uphold in a world more and more closely threatened by "toughness," cruelty and injustice'.[211]

Whilst Gollancz did point out the presence and continued suffering of survivors in many of the liberated camps, it is perhaps noteworthy that he too retained a distinct focus on the experiences of German Jews and, in this case, on the specific terms of their relationship to Britain. Accounts of the refugees' attempts to enter the country and of their subsequent treatment combined with Gollancz's criticism of the British Government's internment policy. Both topics once more kept the reader's attention (and perhaps that of the author also), on the question of refugees, on those who made

[208] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.6.
[209] ibid, p.7. The lines of William Wordsworth's poem that Gollancz referred to read as follows; 'Men are we, and most grieve when even the shade, Of that which once was great has passed away.'
[210] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.7.
[211] ibid, p.9.

it to safety and on the response of the British state. The subject of discussion was the situation in Britain – rather than the meaning of the situation in the liberated camps in Europe in 1945. It was the refugees who had reached Britain and their future treatment that had to be judged against the standards of the British or English way of life; 'we haven't the smallest right to demand of the general mass of German Jews what the general mass of Englishmen would, if similarly placed, regard as intolerable'.[212] Gollancz tried to balance a sense that the extent of the suffering needed to be made clear – 'it is necessary to remind ourselves of just what these people have endured' – with a concentrated focus on the future and the same attempt to avoid dwelling on the past that was evident in the Zionist Review; 'I am not concerned with those who have gone: let the dead bury the dead. I am concerned with the living.'[213]

The future, as for the writers of the Zionist Review, lay in Palestine. Gollancz gave over the second half of his essay to a detailed discussion of the topic. However a similar sensitivity surrounding the particularity of the subject may still have been evident in Gollancz's question 'Do I speak merely as a Jew – do I not rather speak with the voice of common humanity everywhere – when I say that to make Palestine a Jewish homeland is to increase the sum total of human justice?' [214] Norman Bentwich would later recall that Gollancz modified his initial 'enthusiasm' for the new state and was critical 'of the actions of the Government of Israel towards the Arabs'.[215] Yet, in 1945 in a particularly passionate paragraph influenced by the atmosphere of the liberation year and that drew on a symbolic picture of Britain, Gollancz tried to explain what the establishment of a new Jewish homeland would mean for Jewish citizens in Britain. Returning to the question of loyalty that had always been at the heart of British Jewry's relationship with this country, Gollancz argued that the idea that Jews would be faced with 'dual loyalty' after the creation of the new state was 'nonsense'.[216] Gollancz offered the country further reassurance; 'England need never

[212] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.9.
[213] ibid, pp. 4-5.
[214] ibid, p.23.
[215] Norman Bentwich, My 77 Years, p.226.
[216] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.22.

feel afraid...least of all about the loyalty of those who are as proud to be Jews as they are proud to be Englishmen.'[217]

The question of loyalty still prompted Gollancz to explain his own connection and his own commitment to Britain; 'I was born in London fifty-two years ago: I was educated at Oxford: I am writing this by an open window that looks out over a Berkshire lane.'[218] His words illustrate once more the importance both then and now of the landscape and of naturalistic, pastoral imagery in ideas of British, or Englishness, this time balanced against a picture of Palestine; 'Do you imagine that I love what Wells has called 'the great rain-swept heart of the modern world' or New College garden, or the grass and sweet briar outside my window, any the less because I long, now that the war is over, to see the wild flowers of a Palestine spring?'[219] Just as would be the case in the BBC's creation of A Picture of Britain in 2005, Gollancz drew not only on the British landscape but also on the work of British poets and writers to explain his understanding of the balance between his Jewishness and his Britishness; 'Do I feel Shelley and Wordsworth and Blake the less mine, because Isaiah and Ezekiel speak to me with a peculiarly personal and a peculiarly intimate message?' [220] His pride in the success of the first communities in Palestine did not mean, Gollancz argued that he was 'less proud to inherit, with forty eight million other Englishmen, the English tradition of freedom'.[221] It is significant perhaps that throughout that particular paragraph Gollancz did not refer to Britain at all, but only to England and the English. Still only a matter of weeks since the liberation of Bergen Belsen, the self conscious, even defensive explanation of the validity of a Jewish sense of belonging in England and the references to a symbolic England of poets and 'sweet briar' as proof of Jewish loyalty reveal the continued insecurity of British Jewry and the importance of notions of British and English identity in their responses to 1945.

[217] Victor Gollancz, Nowhere to Lay their Heads, p.22.
[218] ibid, p.22.
[219] ibid, p.22.
[220] ibid, p.22.
[221] ibid, p.22.

In 1945 James Parkes wrote 'we cannot go back to the world of 1939; we must go forward or perish'.[222] In 1945 the need to move forward provided British Jews with reassurance and offered the possibility of a new Jewish identity for the future. It also served as a distraction from the challenges posed by an engagement with the events of the past twelve years in Europe and from the doubts regarding their own response. Whilst the destruction process was ongoing their charitable efforts were numerous and sustained; their internal concerns and insecurities were debilitating. In 1945 their pain at the sight of the liberated camps was profound; in seeking their own cognitive control their response was to look away, backwards to a familiar past or forwards to a new future. Their reaction, whatever form it took, was grounded in their British identity; not only affected by the atmosphere of 1945 Britain, but more importantly also shaped by their interpretation of the relationship between their Jewishness and their Britishness. British Jews' response to the destruction of Europe's Jews cannot be disconnected from the response of their own country, from Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Leaving the liberation year of 1945, the final chapter of this study will explore the form that relationship takes today.

[222] James Parkes, An Enemy of the People: Anti-Semitism, (Penguin, Liverpool, 1945), p145.

Chapter Five

Now and Then
The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition and Britain's Search for 'Cognitive Control' Today

In July 1994 the Jewish Chronicle raised the subject of the absence of a national exhibition or museum dealing with the Holocaust in Britain, 'British Jewry has never acknowledged the Holocaust in the same way that continental Jewry has done. After all, this country was spared the full horrors of Nazism. Without a museum however, future generations of Jews and non-Jews – here will know even less about it than their parents.'[1] That the proposal for a large-scale Holocaust exhibition in Britain prompted such a self-conscious statement from the Jewish Chronicle, a statement rooted in the British Jewish reactions explored in the previous chapter, confirms the significance of that exhibition in Britain's complex relationship with the destruction of European Jewry. The concept of a British Holocaust museum or exhibition and the eventual development of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition have revealed the continued centrality of notions of British identity in British attempts to bring the Holocaust under 'cognitive control'.[2] The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition represents another, and perhaps one of the most comprehensive examples, of a British response to the destruction of European Jewry that remains rooted in understandings of Britishness. The exhibition should be considered not simply as a product of an intensive present day focus on the Holocaust, but rather as part of a connection between Britain and that event that began in 1933. In this final chapter, a close reading of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition will take the form of a 'step by step' analysis of the exhibition's design and content. Significant space will be given to an assessment of the exhibition's representation of Britain's involvement in the liberation process, the cornerstone event in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. The place of a museum in the cultural, intellectual and national consciousness of a country will be considered and will illustrate the significance of a

[1] Jewish Chronicle, 26 July 1994.
[2] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence: Forging A Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain 1945 - 46', in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), p.24.

museum in any discussion of national identity. Of key importance will be the need to pause and consider the impact that an attempt to represent the Holocaust has had on the role and meaning of the museum. In the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, Britain has built a representation of its *own* construction of the Holocaust. Now, as then, that representation is grounded in and confirms the 'culturally safe' narratives of British national identity.[3]

In February 2006 the University of Leicester held a conference entitled 'Material Culture, Identities and Inclusion' that sought to explore the role of museums and galleries as 'cultural institutions'. The conference aimed to consider the role that 'museums and galleries play in supporting communities to express their cultural life, and personal and collective identities'. The conference is evidence of the growing level of academic interest in the museum.[4] A museum is certainly one of a society's most recognisable and familiar institutions. Most individuals will encounter a museum at least once in their lives. Acknowledging that fact, museologist Susan Crane has written of a 'shared museal consciousness' evident across societies and countries. This shared recognition of the role and value of museums, Crane argues, is something that means we all understand the significance of 'collecting, ordering, representing, and preserving information in the way museums do, a sensibility that has become more common in modernity than ever before'.[5] Whilst it might be possible to speak of a shared sense of the value of a museum, it might not be so easy to extend that argument to suggest a shared sense of the accessibility of such institutions across all age ranges, class and indeed ethnic or religious groups in Britain. The extent to which all sectors of society feel that a museum is somewhere they can or want to go to is still debateable. Exhibits like the Imperial War Museum's on the Holocaust may still only reach those from particular backgrounds for whom the museum is already a part of a particular sense of their lives and of their place in society. For the majority of people, however, the museum represents a site of learning. It is assumed that the museum visitor will be exposed to a representation of 'culture' within a museum's walls. The contents of a museum are regarded without question to be of significance and of relevance. Objects included within a museum are

[3] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.13.
[4] 'Material Culture, Identities and Inclusion', an AHRC-Funded Conference, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 9-10 February 2006.
[5] Susan Crane, (ed), Museums and Memory, (Stanford, Standford University Press, 2000), p.1.

endowed with a sense of cultural, historical or national significance and may then be used to sustain national narratives, so that Brian Wallis concludes, 'Visual representations are a key element in symbolising and sustaining national communal bonds.'[6] A museum therefore infuses its contents and work with a degree of authenticity in the mind of the visitor. An exhibition or a museum will often be found at the centre of debates surrounding the accurate and authentic representation of a people's identity. Those debates are not limited to an analysis of the peoples and experiences that the museum chooses to display. They include questions regarding the way in which the museum reflects the lives and experiences of its *own* people, of the people who make up the community or country of which the museum is part. Choices made by museums or exhibitions with regard to artefacts, displays, the histories and events that are represented within, provide particular cultures, lives or experiences with a degree of importance and of permanence. If museums 'solidify culture, endow it with a tangibility, in a way few other things do'[7], then the presence of a large scale Holocaust Exhibition in Britain's capital city solidifies Britain's relationship with the destruction of European Jewry.

Despite being 'virtually sacred spaces in the past, museums have become hotly contested battlegrounds'.[8] The museum's identity has changed with time so that the Victorian vision of a museum's role has been surpassed by the more diverse demands of modern society. Steven Dubin has argued that 'contemporary museums are potentially accountable to diverse constituencies instead of being subject to the whims of a single wealthy patron or collector'.[9] He adds that the modern museum 'no longer merely provides a pleasant refuge from ordinary life, nor are they simply repositories for received wisdom'.[10] Museums today provide not only a home for the objects, documents and artefacts of the past but must also create an environment that is educational, interactive and entertaining. Thus, as Andreas Huyssen suggests, the museum has become a 'mass medium' and that has meant that 'spectators in ever

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[6] Brian Wallis, 'Selling Nations; International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy' in Daniel Sherman and Iritt Rogoff, (eds), Museum Culture; Histories, Discourses and Spectacles, (Routledge, London, 1994), p.3.
[7] Steven Dubin, Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum, (New York University Press, New York, 1999).p.3.
[8] ibid, p.3.
[9] ibid, p.9.
[10] ibid, p.5.

larger numbers seem to be looking for emphatic experiences, instant illuminations, stellar events and blockbuster shows rather than serious and meticulous appropriation of cultural knowledge'.[11] A modern museum faces a competitive market for audience numbers and a potential audience who themselves are increasingly demanding. The museum must use all the tools of modern representation to attract the visitor; 'Banners and billboards on museum fronts indicate how close the museum has moved to the world of spectacle, of the popular fair and mass entertainment. The museum itself has been sucked into the maelstrom of modernisation.'[12] Any British museum also finds itself part of a growing heritage industry that now incorporates the increasingly popular representation of historical events on national television. In a study of the place of Belsen in British memory, Tony Kushner has commented that, 'the gulf between heritage and history is a real one and it has made and continues to make a huge impact on the representation of Belsen and the Holocaust generally'.[13] Ultimately the Holocaust exhibition, perhaps more than any other, must balance the question of 'how to elucidate without lapsing into entertainment'.[14] The consequences of the various modes of Holocaust representation for the study and, crucially, for the memory of the destruction process have long concerned critics of fiction, art and film that take the Holocaust as their subject material. The factors that influence a museum, not least the need to attract an audience and to generate funding are no less significant in trying to assess the impact that their specific mode of representation has on the Holocaust. The sensitivity of Holocaust museum or exhibition curators regarding the place of entertainment in their chosen representation of the Holocaust has often been evident. For example, the location of the exhibit in relation to the display of so-called 'lighter' subjects or the proximity of the Holocaust related material to the museum shop or café often causes concern. No such café was initially planned for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C for 'fear of desecrating the holiness of the place', according to the museum's director. [15] Questions remain as to the role and nature of museums in society. When the question becomes, 'what is a

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[11] Andreas Huyssen, 'Escape From Amnesia; The Museum as Mass Medium' in Twilight Memories; Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia, (Routledge, London, 1995), p.14.
[12] ibid, p.21.
[13] Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business to Shoah Business: History, Memory and Heritage, 1945 to 2005', p.38.
[14] Adrian Dannatt, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: James Ingo Freed – Architecture in Detail, (Phaidon Press, London, 1995), p.6.
[15] Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli, Holocaust Museum in Washington, (Rizzoli, New York, 1995), p.18.

Holocaust museum', or more significantly, 'what is a British Holocaust museum', then the complex nature of the relationship between the Holocaust and notions of national identity is added to the debate already surrounding ideas of 'material culture', 'social inclusion' and 'multi layered cultural heritages' in the museum setting.[16]

Britain's *own* Holocaust Exhibition

The Imperial War Museum's decision to proceed with a full-scale permanent exhibition on the Holocaust was officially announced by the chair of the museum's Board of Trustees, Field Marshall Lord Bramall on 23 April 1996. In a report covering the development of the new exhibition, the director of the museum, Robert Crawford, spoke of the need to put the Holocaust 'on record' in Britain's capital city; 'We have long felt it necessary to develop at our headquarters building in Southwark a major narrative historical exhibition which will place on record forever in the UK's capital, the hideous story of the Nazi regime's persecution and destruction of the Jews of Europe.'[17] The report was keen to provide examples of the connections between Britain and the Holocaust. The Imperial War Museum suggested that the introduction of the Holocaust onto the British National Curriculum and the increasing frailty of Holocaust survivors were the best proof of the need for such a Holocaust exhibition in Britain. The opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C had also been a factor in the development of the British exhibition. In 1994, for example, the Jewish Chronicle had commented that, 'the recent opening in Washington of a nationally supported Holocaust museum provides an impressive and instructive model'.[18] In the Imperial War Museum's 1996 report on the Holocaust Exhibition, the link between the British people, the role of their country and the destruction process was still explained from the starting point that Britain represented a liberating nation. Lord Bramall had commented, 'It was the Allies' discovery of the Nazi death camps throughout Europe which, more than anything, had convinced them that they were fighting a just war.'[19] The proposals for the Holocaust exhibition ensured that the British public were presented with images of the destruction process as a further endorsement of the moral correctness of the Second World War. From its

[16] 'Material Culture, Identities and Inclusion', University of Leicester, February 2006.
[17] Robert Crawford, 'Imperial War Museum Report', Holocaust Exhibition Reports, (Imperial War Museum, London, Winter 1996/7).
[18] Jewish Chronicle, 18 November 1994.
[19] Lord Bramall, 'Imperial War Museum Report', Holocaust Exhibition Reports.

inception, the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum was always accompanied and influenced by the legacy of Britain's wartime activity. In its first reports in reaction to the Imperial War Museum exhibition the Jewish Chronicle cemented the perceived relationship between the display of the destruction process in this country and Britain's wartime identity – the connection at the basis of Britain's *own* construction of the Holocaust. The newspaper commented; 'the fact that the Holocaust display is part of a broader national museum ensures that the many individuals and groups who already visit the Imperial War Museum will understand the Shoah as an inextricable part of their nation's wartime history alongside the Battle of Britain and the Normandy landings'.[20] As Mark Connelly has argued, very little could challenge the central position of events like the Normandy landings or the Battle of Britain in British national memory or identity.[21] However, in order that a version of the Holocaust be represented and understood in this country, its amalgamation into that powerful national and cultural narrative has been, and continues to be, absolutely necessary.

As *Chapter Three* has explored, that relationship between Britain's own understanding of the Holocaust and the Second World War was cemented in the liberation year of 1945. The moments in British history that are still seen to represent Britishness at its best remained at the forefront of Britain's continued 'domestication' of the Holocaust as it took the form of a Holocaust museum exhibition.[22] In an article for the Jewish Chronicle, Martin Gilbert, a member of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group spoke of the 'inspiring features' of 'Britain's own part in the terrible drama'.[23] Gilbert described the exhibit as 'shocking' and importantly, used the article to emphasise the admission into Britain of 'more than 50,000 refugees before the war'.[24] Britain's part in 'the terrible drama' was quickly cast in terms of rescue and relief. Gilbert also reminded readers that on the subject of the bombing of Auschwitz, 'it was the American government which had declined to take action' and that Churchill had responded to the same suggestion by saying, 'get

[20] Jewish Chronicle, 9 June 2000.
[21] See Mark Connelly's comments included in *Chapter Three* of this study and Connelly's 2004 study, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Pearson Longman, London, 2004).
[22] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence.'
[23] Martin Gilbert, Jewish Chronicle, 9 June 2001.
[24] ibid.

anything out of the air force that you can'.[25] In his own search for 'cognitive control' in the face of the 'shocking' nature of the Holocaust exhibition, Gilbert fell back on the words and actions of the wartime leader, drawing on the reassuring sense of British confidence associated with them. In an article for The Times on 7 June 1996, Gilbert had remarked that 'From the first to the last days of the war, the fate of the Jews was something on which Churchill took immediate and positive action whenever he was asked to do so.'[26] In his assessment of British Jewry's response to the Holocaust, Meier Sompolinsky has been critical of Gilbert's positive interpretation of Churchill's attitude towards the Jews of Europe. Due to what Sompolinsky describes as 'the monolithic aspects of the British anti-escape policy', Churchill did 'not initiate action to save the Jews' and 'unhesitatingly supported Eden on the issue of upholding the closure, knowing full well the results'.[27] Sompolinksy's assertion that Churchill 'knew full well the results' of any failure to act in the name of European Jewry does not account for the nuance and caution necessary in any assessment of knowledge and understanding regarding the details of the destruction process in British society during the war years. However, the reference to Churchill in Gilbert's comments on the development of the Holocaust Exhibition in London illustrate the continued influence of a British Second World wartime narrative on British responses to the destruction of European Jewry, or in this case to the British museum representation of that destruction process.

The presence of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition also prompted Gilbert to return to a reassuring and positive comparison with the apparently limited action of Britain's wartime American allies. As *Chapter One* explored, a difficult and often competitive relationship between Britain and America with regard to Jewish refugees and later in response to the victims of Nazism shaped the years when the destruction process was ongoing. The legacy of that tension was still evident in the comparisons drawn between the nature and content of the London Holocaust exhibit and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the first months after the opening of the former. Indeed Brian Wallis has commented on the role a museum can play in cases of international rivalry; 'in order to establish their status within the

[25] Martin Gilbert, Jewish Chronicle, 9 June 2000.
[26] Martin Gilbert, The Times, 7 June 1996.
[27] Meier Sompolinksy, Britain and the Holocaust: The Failure of the Anglo-Jewish Leadership?, (Sussex Academic Press, London, 1999), p.3.

international community, individual nations are compelled to dramatise conventionalised versions of their national images, asserting past glories and amplifying stereotypical differences'.[28] The Jewish Chronicle described the Washington museum as, 'an enormous, complex and painfully moving exhibition which has been visited by millions, old and young; Britain's response, if on a fittingly smaller scale has been no less powerful'.[29] The suggestion that the reduced scale of the Imperial War Museum exhibit was somehow 'fitting' for a British Holocaust exhibition hinted at the long-term debate over the very appropriateness of such an exhibit on British soil. The phrase also illustrated how a definition of Britishness and of what was considered 'appropriate' for Britain (rather than for the representation or memory of the Holocaust itself) was always at the forefront of the discussions that surrounded the exhibition's development. The initial responses to the opening of the exhibition in June 2000 maintained that focus on the implications of the exhibit for Britain and British identity and Tony Blair asked that 'the Imperial War Museum exhibit serve as 'our nation's site of remembrance and honour to the victims of the Holocaust, act as a symbol of our diligence that never again will man's evil capabilities have such despicable consequences'.[30]

Britain's search for a degree of control over the Holocaust and for a means to understand and contextualise the event has often required the construction of an increasingly narrow definition of national identity. That narrow definition has forced many of the ordinary British men and women whose responses have been explored in this thesis to turn from Britishness to a version of Englishness and English identity. The transition from British or Britishness to Englishness has drawn upon particular motifs of Englishness grounded in the physical landscape, in art and culture and in particular historical moments. The Imperial War Museum, home to the Holocaust Exhibition, may itself be said to represent a source of Englishness, a place that is interconnected with the memorialisation and representation of events that often prompt British people to substitute British for 'English' in their responses and in their construction of memories. The Imperial War Museum is the central repository for the military and social artefacts that, arguably, are at the core of British national identity

[28] Brian Wallis, 'Selling Nations; International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy', p.4.
[29] Jewish Chronicle, 9 June 2000.
[30] Tony Blair at the official opening of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, 6 June 2000.

and the construction of a British national memory. The museum, housed in the buildings formerly occupied by the Bethlem Royal Hospital for the insane was founded in 1917 as a national memorial and war museum. The museum's purpose was intended to be the preservation and display of objects and materials relating to the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Today, the museum has massive holdings of objects and documents relating to British and Commonwealth involvement in conflict throughout the twentieth century. Information on the First World War, one of the most widely researched historical moments, is extensive. Huge twin Royal Navy guns dominate the museum entrance. Born out of conflict and a desire to document British victory in conflict, the museum plays a significant part in British, and often a specifically English form, of the memorialisation of both World Wars and subsequent conflicts today. As a result, many in Britain regard the institution as having a dual role as both a museum and a memorial site.

Any museum must often attempt a delicate balancing act between representation and memorialisation, especially if, as Andreas Huyssen has argued, 'the issue of remembrance and forgetting touches the core of Western identity, however multi faceted and diverse it may be'.[31] The structure and narrative of a museum can bring order and control to the diverse nature of memory; those narratives can also create and sustain a variety of memories. The visitor to a museum like the Imperial War Museum may, for example, feel a shared sense of a wider memory that need not be based in any actual shared or lived experience. For example, a recent American exhibition on the Second World War greeted its visitors with the words, 'We All Remember World War Two'. Whilst in truth there are only a specific and limited number of individuals, both in America and in Britain who can and do remember the Second World War, there is also as Steven Lubar argues, 'another deeper sense' in which 'we do all remember the war. We remember it in family stories, national mythology, the history we learned in school and the movies we saw on television.'[32] We 'remember' it also through the construction and content of museum exhibitions. The relationship between the museum and memory ensures that the events they depict and the objects

[31] Andreas Huyssen, 'Monuments and Holocaust Memory in a Media Age' in Twilight Memories, p.14.
[32] Steven Lubar, 'Exhibiting Memories', in Amy Henderson and Adrienne Kaeppler, (eds), Exhibiting Dilemmas; Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian, (Smithsonian Institute Press; Washington, 1997), p.25.

they include, 'become components of identities – even for individuals who would in no other way feel connected to these objects'.[33] The complex nature of memory's role specifically in Holocaust historiography is, Dan Stone has argued, directly connected to the relationship between the Holocaust and the mode of its representation, not least in places such as museums: 'the problem of memory has informed much recent work on the Holocaust because the Holocaust resists modernist, museal notions of the fading memory and its replacement by history'.[34] In a museum, Stone has argued, 'individual memories are subsumed under the "official" commemoration, which, whether it is memorial or narrative, gives cognitive order to the chaos of memories'.[35] If, as James Young concludes, 'in every nation's memorials and museums, a different Holocaust is remembered',[36] then it is Britain's *own* ordered and controlled Holocaust that is 'remembered' in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition.

The location of the Imperial War Museum ensured a central position at the heart of Britain's capital city for the Holocaust exhibition. The exhibition occupies a purpose built addition to the museum's original building. It is both at once part of, and distinct from the other exhibits on a physical level. The question of the location of the exhibit within the museum itself was debated from the outset. The Holocaust exhibition is completely enclosed, although in order to start their tour of the Holocaust exhibit, visitors must pass through the main hall of the museum. The foyer of the Imperial War Museum is dominated by arguably some of the most recognisable and symbolic military aircraft and machinery in British history.[37] Much may be made of the significance of the need for an extension to the original building in terms of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust: it might appear as though the Holocaust constituted a second thought, an overlooked element in the museum's narrative that had to be added as a concession to the growing focus on the Holocaust and more cynically, as a means to corner a part of the expanding Holocaust market that Tim Cole has

[33] Susan Crane, (ed), Museums and Memory, p. 2.
[34] Dan Stone, Constructing the Holocaust, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2003), p.135.
[35] ibid, p.141.
[36] James Young, The Texture of Memory; Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993), Introduction.
[37] Note that March 2006 saw the 70th anniversary of the construction and flight of the first Spitfire: a special fly past was held in the aircraft's home city of Southampton and the anniversary was widely covered in the national media.

explored.[38] And yet the position of this exhibit confirms the particular nature of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Britain has always approached the subject of the destruction of European Jewry through a definition of Britishness. In an article that stands out amongst the plethora of positive and congratulatory responses to the Imperial War Museum exhibit, Rebecca Abrams of the New Statesman seemed surprised by the Britishness of the museum's representation. She asked, 'What about the bizarrely British 'take' on the Holocaust? Didn't that bother anyone? Despite depicting events that took place in central and eastern Europe, the exhibition has a decisively English flavour; detached, objective, preoccupied with gadgets and gismos; prurient, faintly evasive.'[39] Abrams went on to point out the absence of any detailed reference in the exhibit to those aspects of the connection between the Holocaust and Britain that are indeed sensitive, 'there is nothing at all on the plight of Jewish enemy aliens, nothing about the experiences of the Kindertransport children after 1939; very little about how far the Church responded to Nazism'. Yet in her expectation of an alternative representation of such events she misunderstood the nature of Britain's relationship with the destruction process. She underestimated the influence of both the museum and the nation's dominant national narrative.[40] As the case studies of the British response to the refugees from Nazism in the 1930s and involvement in the liberation year of 1945 have shown, that the refugee crisis and the very real ambiguities of British responses to the destruction process can appear to be seamlessly incorporated without self criticism into the museum's representation of the Holocaust is consistent with Britain's attempt to bring this event under 'cognitive control'. That process of incorporation confirms a British need to interpret the destruction of European Jewry from within a reassuring definition of British identity. That the existing structures of the Imperial War Museum should have remained unchanged and that the space for the Holocaust exhibition was *incorporated* is entirely consistent with the place occupied by the Holocaust in British consciousness since 1933. A 'step by step' analysis of Britain's large and sophisticated Holocaust Exhibition reveals how Britain has built its *own* museum representation of the Holocaust.

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[38] See for example, Tim Cole, Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold, (Routledge, New York, 1999).
[39] Rebecca Abrams, 'Showing the Shoah', New Statesman, 17 July 2000, pp.43 – 46.
[40] ibid.

The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

The Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition follows a textbook chronological approach to the rise of the Nazi party. The visitor's direction around the exhibit is largely controlled by the structure and display of the objects and by the museum's accompanying narrative. The control that a museum has to determine a visitor's path, Susan Crane has argued, may limit a visitor's ability to interpret what they are witnessing independently; 'the institutional nature of the museum has encouraged the construction of narratives that inhibit random access in favour of orderly, informative meaning-formation'.[41] The exhibit provides the visitor with a small section entitled, 'Life Before the Nazis', prior to a display dealing with 1919 and the content of the Versailles Treaty. This first space is softly lit and wood panelled. It contains a number of black and white photographs. A short film shows individuals discussing their childhood. The individuals on the tape and in the pictures are not identified. It is not clear to the visitor whether these are Jewish or non-Jewish people. The decision not to identify the individuals concerned may suggest an attempt on behalf of the museum to ensure that the visitor should not make any cultural or social assumptions about the people who experienced the Holocaust. It is perhaps also a rather self-conscious attempt to deal with concerns over a focus on Jewish suffering to the detriment of other victim groups. That continued debate is suggested by the words included in this section of the exhibit that present the visitor with the museum's definition of the Holocaust and that conclude in rather generalised terms that, 'the Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of other people as well'.[42] The same kinds of questions about inclusion continue to accompany Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day, held annually on 27 January, the anniversary of Auschwitz Birkenau's liberation. As Tony Kushner has suggested, this debate may illustrate a growing trend of anti- particularism in Britain, something that itself has a long history in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust and the recognition of its Jewish victims: not least in the liberation year of 1945. How far the visitor notices or recognises the possibility of the debate surrounding these questions of inclusion is questionable. The natural authority with which a museum endows its exhibits and artefacts diminishes the possibility of any further engagement with that debate on the part of the museum visitor. Indeed the visitor is assured that

[41] Susan Crane, Museums and Memory, p.4
[42] The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, Exhibition Narrative.

the exhibit will offer them conclusions - answers to the difficult question of 'how and why this happened'.[43]

The low lighting, music and confined nature of the space in the opening section of the exhibit was perhaps designed to achieve a sense of a gathering storm surrounding the people in the images. The nostalgic tales of happy childhoods are offset by a sense of foreboding. Arguably, the exhibit achieves a level of understanding in the visitor that what is to come is disturbing and that what they are witnessing in the film and in the photographs is a lost world or at least something distinctly *past*; although the amount of time visitors spend in this confined and rather uncomfortable space before moving forward into the body of the exhibition is questionable. In *Chapter Two* Holocaust survivors' search for lost childhoods, for lives *before* and their struggle with memories of pasts now interwoven with and coloured by memories of persecution and suffering was explored. The museum display's attempt to represent that lost past and to perhaps hint at such struggles for survivors may not achieve the same intensity, or naturally, the same personal connection as the Holocaust testimonies of survivors such as Wiesel and Levi. However, the museum's first space does illustrate the challenges generated by an attempt to represent the Holocaust in museum or exhibition form. How to do justice to the multi facetted and rich nature of the lives of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust whilst recording the destruction of those lives? How to balance the representation of the victims with that of the perpetrators? It is arguably a conflict that remains unresolved throughout the Imperial War Museum exhibition. Just as was the case in the liberation year of 1945, the balance between the representation of the Holocaust's victims, survivors and perpetrators in Britain's Holocaust Exhibition is witness to Britain's *own* understanding of the Holocaust.

The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition is detailed and extensive. One journalist described the exhibition as 'something which takes at least two hours to examine properly and, I suspect, will stay in the memory forever'.[44] The amount of information presented to the visitor both visually and in the form of a written narrative is huge. It would require a second or third visit to absorb in its entirety. That return

[43] The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Narrative.
[44] David Robson, The Sunday Express, Comments included in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Visitor's Guide, 2001.

visit is something that very few visitors are likely to undertake. In their otherwise positive response to the opening of the exhibition two volunteers from London's Wiener Library (Institute of Contemporary History) also expressed their concern that one visit would be unlikely to be enough.[45] The physical layout of the exhibition is carefully controlled and spread across two levels. The design of the exhibition is constructed to support and enhance the narrative chosen by the museum. The coloured tiles on the floor change with the different subjects on display and lighting and temperature changes are made throughout. The opportunities for the visitor to be diverted from the chosen chronology and form of representation are few. It might be argued that the impressive and polished design modes of the exhibition compete with the details of the destruction process for the visitor's attention. The museum approaches its representation of the Holocaust using the same tools it would to display any other historical event. As a result it is just as conscious of the need to attract and maintain visitors' attention. It is not, it would seem, enough to present the facts of the destruction process without this focus on impressive modern design.

The First Stages of the Holocaust Exhibition

The chronological approach of the exhibition to the destruction process makes it possible to control a large and difficult subject within the boundaries of a museum. In turn the museum offers Britain the opportunity to control and contain the Holocaust within the structures of its own national narrative. There is little attempt to take the opportunity to offer the visitor an alternative approach to the pattern of events that is presented. Furthermore, the exhibition does not take or offer the opportunity to challenge a tradition, textbook and therefore perpetrator centric approach to the Holocaust. The first stage of the exhibition takes the visitor from 1918 through to 1939 before he or she must start the second stage with the invasion of Poland. This first stage is focused upon the development of the Nazi party and Nazi ideology. Nazi propaganda, literature and uniforms are displayed and Nazi voices are heard in recordings of rallies and speeches. These recordings are played repeatedly. As a result, the sounds and sights of the Nazis surround the visitor in what gradually becomes a more and more concentrated and confined space. Some sense of the

[45] 'Holocaust Exhibition Opens at War Museum', in The Weiner Library News Bulletin, (Number 35, August 2000), p.1. It might also be interesting to note here that the Wiener Library describes itself as 'the world's oldest Holocaust memorial institution' and that it too, like the Holocaust Exhibition, occupies a central London position.

omnipresence of the Nazis in German life at this time is achieved. However, throughout this section the voices and lives of the perpetrators dominate. A small display to one side of the visitors' main walkway briefly charts the history of Jewish communities across Europe. This is done alongside displays recording the development of antisemitism in the same period. Interestingly, Charles Danson of the Wiener Library praised the exhibit for 'enabling the public to understand the long history of anti Semitism which forms the background of the Holocaust'.[46] To represent the history of antisemitism either in Europe or indeed in Britain would surely require considerably more space and time than that which is offered by the museum's display. It is perhaps noteworthy that many responses to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, particularly from the visiting general public, credit the exhibition with providing a comprehensive history, a complete picture, often not only of the Holocaust itself, but of Jewish history, or of the history of genocide and of antisemitism. Many visitors, it seems, find in the exhibition their manageable and controlled version of the Holocaust. At this point in the exhibit, Jewish religious artefacts coexist alongside early antisemitic literature, not least of all, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. A focus on antisemitism may risk the development of a greater distance between the lives of the Jewish individuals whose experiences define the Holocaust and the present day museum visitor. Jewish life is largely represented in association with an experience of persecution and victimhood. Whilst the visitor may be confronted with the images of the destruction process in this exhibition, like the British people viewing pictures of the liberated Bergen Belsen in 1945, they are given little sense of *what and who* it was that was destroyed.

Eighteen Holocaust survivors do feature throughout the exhibition and as a result 'the victims are certainly not silenced'.[47] The museum has always been keen to emphasise the involvement of Holocaust survivors in the exhibition and it is indeed one area in which former critics of the exhibition such as Rebecca Abrams of the New Statesman were more positive; 'at the newly opened Holocaust exhibition the faces and voices of survivors are crucial and dominant'.[48] Abrams' use of the term 'dominant' may be too generous. The survivors' testimony is brought to museum visitors via seven television

[46] Charles Danson, 'Holocaust Exhibit Opens at War Museum' in The Wiener Library Bulletin, p.2.
[47] Tony Kushner, 'Holocaust Testimony, Ethics and the Problem of Representation', in Poetics Today, (Volume 27, Number 2, Summer 2006), p.288.
[48] Rebecca Abrams, 'Showing the Shoah.'

screens in a series of short films. However, the use of survivor testimony in this exhibition remains problematical. The genuinely moving nature of the testimony needs no embellishment. Survivors' words are instead *used* as an embellishment. They are the tool used when 'proof' of lived experience is required or when a particular atmosphere or reaction is deemed necessary.[49] As *Chapter Two* identified, the challenging dynamics of Holocaust survivor testimony have consistently tested Britain, and other nations', ability to bring the Holocaust under the controlling and reassuring influence of their national narratives. As Peter Novick's work on America and the Holocaust has illustrated, the museum is also one of the clearest examples of the complicated interplay between notions of collective memory and the use of Holocaust survivor testimony.[50] Testimony and its potential to inform the visitor, to reveal the richness of the lives of the victims of the Holocaust and indeed to challenge, is restricted so that in London, testimony provides the 'colour and texture' to the account of the Holocaust presented by the Imperial War Museum. It was always intended that testimony would be integrated into, rather than be the driving force in the exhibition. For example, in a 2002 article, Susan Bardgett, Project Director of the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, recalled the selection and filming of testimony for the exhibition; 'cassettes of material would arrive in our Office, and we would watch sections of programmes and realise the power which the survivor stories would have (it was tantalising to try and visualise how they would fit in with all the other elements we were gathering)'.[51] It is perhaps noteworthy that what might be considered to be the greatest and most revealing challenge in the use of testimony – how to account for its relationship to the event being represented – should only receive a bracketed thought from the exhibition's project leader. At the planning stage of London's Holocaust Exhibition, survivor testimony was secondary to 'the other elements' sought for the exhibition and it remained so when the exhibition finally took solid form in 2000. After all, the need to 'make things fit' may be the most concise way to define Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Whilst testimony does *feature* throughout the exhibition, the perpetrator driven nature of the museum's chosen chronology and narrative also determines the moment when survivor

[49] See Tony Kushner, 'Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience; Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting' in Oral History, (Volume 29, Number 2, Autumn 2001).
[50] See for example, Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory; The American Experience, (Bloomsbury, London, 1999).
[51] Susan Bardgett, 'Holocaust Survivors Tell their Story at the Imperial War Museum', in Jewish Care Magazine, Winter 2001.

testimony is used and effects its impact on visitors. Tony Kushner concludes of the Imperial War Museum that 'Survivor testimony is yet again marginalised and used to illustrate the impact of what the Nazis did rather than being part of an intensive study of the survivors' lives as a whole.'[52] The museum's use of survivor testimony not only represents a missed opportunity to face the challenges posed by the representation and content of testimony, but also remains one of the clearest symbols of Britain's relationship with the destruction of European Jewry. As explored in *Chapter Two*, a museum's decision to use testimony, their chosen mode of representation and even the detail of the location and duration of testimony excerpts included within the body of an exhibit, is evidence of the version of the Holocaust that a nation builds for itself. Britain's own search for 'cognitive control' over the Holocaust attempts to resist the disruptive and disturbing features of survivor testimony, seeking the reassurance of clear psychological boundaries between victor and perpetrator, victim and survivor and the security offered by the ability to contain an event – its beginning, middle and its end – within the physical boundaries of a museum exhibition. It is Britain's search for a means to understand the Holocaust and to draw that disruptive force within the controlling domestic and familiar narratives of national identity that means 'it is not surprising that filmmakers, museum curators, and publishers like neat, packageable narrative structures'.[53]

The development of the first concentration camps is dealt with in this early part of the exhibit. Their connection to the camps that are explored in the representation of the latter stages of the destruction process is not fully explained to the visitor. Despite the dominance of Auschwitz's name today, the extent to which people are really aware of the distinctions between the camps in the Nazi system remains in many ways a benchmark of knowledge levels about the Holocaust, so that in 2005 Tony Kushner must still ask of Britain today, 'Is there now widespread understanding of the key role Auschwitz was to play in the 'Final Solution' of the Jewish question and the differing, if linked, history and function of Belsen?'[54] The experiences of prisoners in these first camps are signalled in the exhibition by the large photograph of the bowed, shaved heads of Dachau's first captives. Their faces are in the main part indistinguishable.

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[52] Tony Kushner, 'Holocaust Testimony, Ethics and the Problem of Representation', p.289.
[53] ibid, p.288.
[54] Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business to This Shoah Business', p.13.

The Nazis' attempts to define and enact the early stages of their racial policy are also covered in exhibit sections dealing with the use of medical experimentation. These are again accompanied by the propaganda films and undoubtedly have a considerable shock value for the visitor. The nature of Nazi propaganda is dealt with in a section entitled, 'Outcasts'. The small, black tiled section in which visitors are momentarily forced together is dominated by the voice of Joseph Goebbels. Only in a separate and small annex do the voices of survivors play a role in explaining to the visitors the impact of the Nuremberg legislation, designed to remove Jews from the structures of German society, and introduced in 1935. Only a small number of visitors at any one time can access this space. Again, if the aim had been to build a sense of how all consuming a Nazi presence was in the lives of their victims through the use of small spaces and concentrated sound, then that aim is largely achieved. However, the restrictions of space and even a certain degree of discomfort in sharing that space with the sound of the perpetrators may mean that many visitors pass by this vital section of the exhibit and, crucially, miss the words of the survivors.

Refugees and the Beginning of a Relationship

A degree of individuality is returned to the Nazis' victims in a part of the exhibition that is entitled, 'Thousands Seek Refuge'. This section is based on the case study of four families who made an attempt to escape from Nazi Germany with varying degrees of success. As one of the key areas of connection between the victims of the Holocaust and Britain this area of the exhibition is of particular significance. The museum attempts to put names and faces to the statistics of those who tried to flee, although again perhaps as a result of the limitations of space, there is little real sense of what it meant to be a refugee during this time. At several stages during the exhibition small displays appear that deal with events that represent a direct connection between Britain and the destruction process. The first of these deals with the Kindertransport programme and the Evian conference of July 1938. The dual representation of these two events in a single display is significant in terms of the way in which this exhibition might be said to represent Britain's *own* Holocaust. The roots of the process that prompted Britain's involvement in the Evian Conference and the ambivalent and complicated nature of the response to refugees in Britain is not developed. Any question of a complex response to the question of aid for Jewish refugees from Nazism in Britain is offset by the proximity of the details of the

essentially positive surface image of the Kindertransport programme. There is little room here for the doubts that have been raised by the growing academic focus on Allied and so-called bystander responses to the Holocaust with regard to the place of the Kindertransport in British reactions.[55] The extent to which British visitors to the museum have any prior knowledge of the Kindertransport is questionable, especially perhaps considering the results of a BBC opinion poll of 2004 'that revealed that 45% of 4000 adults in Britain surveyed had not heard of Auschwitz'.[56] And yet, the evidence that this example provides of British involvement in the 'rescue' of children from oppression is central to a British visitor's understanding of themselves and their country's connection with the events in Europe. It is a seamless part of a museum dedicated to the representation of that core part of British identity and memory – the liberating nation. It requires little or no prior knowledge, just the continued presence of an unspoken expectation and assumption about British activity.

Even accounting for the size of the project undertaken and the limitations of space, several difficult and complicated areas of British and later, Allied, response to the Holocaust are passed by quickly in this section of the exhibition. Visitors may listen to the recording of a speech made by the Archbishop of Canterbury outlining the plight of the refugees from Nazi Germany during the 1930s. The significance of the Archbishop's relationship with those fighting on behalf of refugees (he was a member of the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror) that is explored in *Chapter One* of this study is not fully developed in the museum setting. Perhaps more significantly, the question of the response of the Church of England or other religious groups to the events in Europe does not receive much attention. There are accounts of the experiences of a British woman who took in refugee children. The difficulties and long term challenges such experiences generated for both the rescuer and the rescued are not assessed. Furthermore the testimony of Henry Fulda, interned in Britain, is a limited attempt to include this most easily overlooked aspect of British state action during the period. Visitor knowledge of the internment policy is arguably even less

[55] See for example: Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939 – 1945, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979), David Wyman, (ed), The World Reacts to the Holocaust, (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996) and Louise London, Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000).

[56] Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business to This Shoah Business', p.14.

comprehensive than that relating to the Kindertransport: an encounter with the realities of the internment policy however is considerably less easy to make. The legacy of a British attitude that associated 'camps' with Germany and with Nazism may still limit British engagement with this aspect of the country's past. In 1945 the interchangeable use of the terms 'internment', 'prisoner of war' and 'labour' to describe the liberated concentration camps also lead British people to a mixture of conclusions regarding the nature of the Nazi camp system and more importantly regarding the identities and experiences of the camps' victims and survivors.

The first stage of the exhibition concludes with a brief exploration of the Nazis' Euthanasia Programme. The small exhibit spaces make an attempt to recognise the connections between each stage of the destruction process difficult; the role of the Euthanasia project in the cumulative development of the destruction process and the involvement of its staff in the later elements of the 'Final Solution' are not explored. For the museum however, the shock value of the programme remains significant and is drawn upon in the display of the surgical table: white, clean and miles, literally and figuratively, from its original and defining context. The object is what catches and retains the visitor's attention and it is undoubtedly a dramatic conclusion to the first stage of the exhibit. The artefact, or Susan Bardgett's 'other elements' have been given precedence over survivor testimony in large Holocaust museums and exhibitions – artefacts that are used in order to tell the tale of the process of extermination (although again, how far these objects retain that ability when removed from their defining context is debatable) and that do not relate the visitor to the lives and experiences of those individuals caught up in that extermination process.[57]

The Second Level of the Exhibition

The visitor may interpret the staircase and the descent to the second level of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition in a variety of ways. The descent ensures a sense of something more challenging and difficult to come and as such may fulfil the museum's desire for a dramatic statement on the scale and progression of the destruction process. However, the staircase may also suggest to the visitor that the event represented can be easily divided or contained, retaining the sense of control

[57] Tony Kushner, 'Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation', p.289.

and of an understandable progression of events that, perhaps more than anything, signifies the Britishness of this exhibition. The semi darkness surrounding the staircase and the next parts of the exhibit often seems to prompt silence in the visitors. A general silence amongst visitors to this exhibit stands as an interesting contrast to their often more lively and vocal responses to the museum's other displays. The detail and content of the Holocaust Exhibition may well of course engender this response. It may however also be argued that it is not so much an engagement with the facts of the Holocaust that trigger such a response in these visitors but rather a combination of the museum's own subtle use of design with a sense that silence is the 'appropriate' response. This may be best illustrated by the way in which the huge image of a young Polish girl and the body of her murdered sister confronts the visitor as they descend the darkened staircase: there is little or no opportunity to avert your gaze from the image. Survivors' voices are used carefully here as they recount the processes of humiliation and degradation inflicted upon them after Nazi occupation. Those voices and the individuality of the experiences they recount must again compete for the visitor's attention with scenes of mass destruction and the impact of the image of the Polish girl. At this stage, it is perhaps noteworthy that many of the museum's picture and testimony choices represent the suffering of women at the hands of the Nazis. Might the museum have considered that the testimony and images of women may have generated a particular and distinct response in the visitor? Previous chapters have noted the very real shock and horror of the British public as they realised that many of the images of the liberated Belsen showed the corpses of women and children. The British people were, however, often just as horrified and both fascinated and distracted by the presence of female Nazi guards at the camp. The image of Nazi women moving corpses in the liberated Bergen Belsen would, for example, haunt one liberating British soldier, Dirk Bogarde, for the rest of his life.[58]

News Reaches Britain

A small cabinet entitled 'News Reaches Britain' is positioned opposite the survivors' video testimonies at this stage of the exhibition. Arguably the combination of the survivors' testimony and the images of the invasion and occupation of Poland captivate and hold visitors' attention. This may limit the level of engagement with

[58] See the *Introduction* to this study for an assessment of Bogarde's complicated memory of Bergen Belsen and the impact that his role as a liberator would have on his lifelong hatred of German people.

'News Reaches Britain'. The narrative accompanying the artefacts in the cabinet instructs the visitor that, 'Britain was reasonably well informed of events in occupied Europe' and that, 'as events unfolded the British government would be pressed to condemn Nazi crimes, to try to stop or hinder them by military and diplomatic means, and to help thousands of refugees who managed to escape from Nazi occupied countries'. There is little detail of the form that pressure on the government took nor on the consequences of such a process for the victims of Nazism. It might be argued that the tone of the language and the absence of any follow up might leave the visitor with the impression that these demands were not just made of the British Government, but were met. The four 'News Reaches Britain' cabinets that are located throughout the exhibition are small, often occupy corner positions or are overshadowed by larger graphic displays. The cabinets do allow for the sense that information about the destruction process entered Britain. The scale, content and location of the cases about *News* of the destruction process hints at the marginalized status that news was often given in British society. However, the position of the cabinets within the exhibition goes further than an attempt to represent the level of knowledge available in Britain regarding the destruction process. When compared in scale and in detail with the section of the exhibit that represents the liberation of the concentration camps, and specifically of the British liberation of Belsen, the 'News Reaches Britain' cabinets are one further indicator of the significance of the liberation year in Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Now as then, in the museum's representation of the destruction process, the emphasis is placed on 1945 and on the act of liberation and the 'amalgam of antipodes' that defined British responses to the plight of firstly German and then European Jewry before 1945 is secondary to the reassuring narrative of the liberating nation.[59]

The Development of the Destruction Process

In the section entitled 'Invasion of the Soviet Union' the exhibition turns to encompass the actions of the Einsatzgruppen mobile killing squads. The display catering for this aspect of the destruction process contains film footage of one of the squads at work. The film is only shown on a small screen some distance from the main walkway of the exhibit. The visitor must approach the screen themselves in

[59] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p. 31.

order to see the film clearly. This section of the museum is in almost complete darkness. Once more the design of the exhibit plays a pivotal role in the impression the visitor gains of the Einsatzgruppen and their work. To see clearly, the visitor is compelled to view the images at close range and to make a decision to do so, leaving the main thoroughfare of the exhibition. The extent to which visitors may be affected by the behaviour of those around them in this area of the museum and by a concern about a degree of voyeurism in making the decision to 'look' at the destruction process in action must be considered. The museum's design decision may actually serve to limit the impact of this area of display. Visitors may find the confrontation with the filmic imagery of the Einsatzgruppen too daunting and may pass by altogether. The result may be that the significance of these groups in the Final Solution's history is lost to them. Beyond the film the visitor is shown displays of the personal belongings of those murdered by the squads. Again viewing these objects successfully requires the visitor to choose to approach the cabinets.

Ghettos and the Choice of Holocaust 'Artefacts'

A narrow darkened corridor takes the visitor to the section of the exhibit entitled 'Ghettos'. This area provides one of the first and few places to sit in the exhibit. The absence of places to pause is arguably something that makes absorption of the wealth of information on display here difficult. The number of visitors only adds to that difficulty. The words of the survivors reappear at this stage of the exhibition. This selective use of the survivors' words makes it difficult to piece together a sense of their own individual stories and chronologies. It becomes a challenge to gain a sense of their lives before the ghetto and visitors may lose track of the specific aspects of each of the individual survivor stories. As before, a carefully chosen object dominates the exploration of existence in the ghettos. The wagon used to collect and carry the dead of the Warsaw ghetto included here is referred to in the museum's accompanying literature as 'the funeral cart from the Warsaw ghetto' and is cited as an example of the 'photographs, documents, newspapers, artefacts, posters and film' that 'offer stark evidence of persecution and slaughter, collaboration and resistance'.[60] The wagon, like the surgical table before it, offers no such evidence. Their inclusion does however perhaps offer further evidence of the consequences of the meeting

[60] Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, leaflet accompanying the exhibition.

between the heritage industry and history and of the perceived need amongst museum visitors to be able to see, touch and feel the 'authenticity' of the event being represented. So for example, the museum's literature tells us that, 'part of a deportation railcar – given by Belgian railways – is on display; visitors can walk up to a wagon once heaved by slave labourers in a concentration camp'. The tone and content of the language a museum uses when engaged in an attempt to attract visitors remains the same when that museum is displaying a version of the Holocaust. Studies in museology have raised questions regarding the 'relative priorities in the display of artefacts' and illustrate the debate surrounding the selection of objects.[61] Susan Bardgett's account of the development of the Holocaust Exhibition in London may suggest that not only does the collection of particular artefacts take priority over others, but also that such a collection process even comes before the historical accuracy of the museum's representation; 'Our three main challenges – to find material to go on display, to get the history right and to make a display which would engage and stimulate the visitor.'[62] That the search for material should come before the need 'to get the history right' in a Holocaust exhibition is at once disturbing and a reminder of the priorities of, and demands upon, a modern museum. A museum's own narrative suggests that objects appear without controversy and with little sense of any struggle surrounding their inclusion in the developmental process of the exhibit. The ordering process imposed upon the museum's choice of objects controls visitors' responses. Indeed, in a study of the use of Holocaust related objects in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Oren Stier has spoken of a 'fiction of coherence' that the choices made with regard to the display of objects creates.[63] Thus the value judgment made in relation to a particular object that began with its selection by the museum's curators is extended in the mind of the visitor. Value and by extension, historical significance is attributed to objects by their very inclusion in displays like the Holocaust Exhibition. The visitor is conditioned as much by their response to the positioning, description and mode of display of a particular object as they are by the object in its own right. An object becomes a trigger for a wide range of museum controlled emotions, connections and conclusions about the subject that is

[61] See for example essays included in Peter Vergo, (ed), The New Museology, (Reaktion Books, London, 1989).
[62] Susan Bardgett, 'Holocaust Survivors Tell their Story at the Imperial War Museum', p.1.
[63] Oren Baruch Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust, (University of Massachusetts Press, Boston, 2003), p.117.

being represented. In Britain, that process ensures that the museum becomes a tool in the continued search for a degree of 'cognitive control' over the Holocaust – the means by which to create and sustain a manageable, ordered British version of the Holocaust.

The Final Solution

The sections of the Imperial War Museum exhibition that deal with the Final Solution begin with displays entitled 'New Ways of Killing'. These are preceded by an opportunity for visitors to divert through a small walkway to the final stages of the exhibition. This avoids the confrontation with the section on the Final Solution and brings visitors to the stages of the display that deal with rescue, resistance and liberation. This diversion should again be considered as an interesting design feature and perhaps as a strange compromise in an exhibition ostensibly designed to represent the Holocaust in its entirety. On a more critical level it might also create a sense of the dramatic, of foreboding and curiosity in the visitor about the forthcoming displays that ensures for the museum the visitor's continued interest in these latter stages of the exhibit. Much might also be made of the implications of such an opportunity to 'opt out' of the sections dealing with the Final Solution for any visitor's ultimate engagement with the exhibition, not to mention the Holocaust as a whole.

The personal belongings of the victims of Chelmo, Sobibor and Treblinka are shown to visitors in glass cabinets and the final part of this section deals with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of the spring of 1943. The area is dominated by a large print of the ghetto burning. Whilst chronology demands that the Uprising should be positioned at this stage of the exhibit, the proximity of this display to that on the Operation Reinhard camps does no justice to an understanding of either. Distinct from the earlier display on the Warsaw ghetto, the details of the Uprising seem to be without context. It is here that a second 'News Reaches Britain' cabinet appears. Visitors are offered the opportunity to listen to recordings related to the development of news of the destruction process in Britain. Visitors may hear the words of Stefan Korbonski, a member of the Polish underground, recalling a telegram he had sent to the BBC detailing the conditions in Warsaw in 1942. The words of Gerhard Reigner, representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva are included. Visitors may also hear from Anthony Eden as he recalled the reaction of MPs to the Allied

Declaration of 17 December 1942. Arguably the details of the Operation Reinhard camps are more likely to consume the visitor here. A real engagement with a display that contains a great deal of detail packed into a small space and requiring considerable reading time from the visitor is unlikely to be fully successful. Occupying the same marginal position that his work did during the years of the destruction process, here too in this corner of the exhibition we find a copy of Victor Gollancz's Let My People Go.[64] The context in which that work was produced and Gollancz's deep personal engagement with the refugee and rescue cause is not developed. The importance of his work in terms of Britain's search for 'cognitive control' that is revealed in this thesis is not explored in Britain's *own* Holocaust exhibition.

Railway Carriages and 'Icons' of Holocaust Representation

Beyond a display on the Nazi chain of command during the Final Solution the visitor finds themselves on uneven wooden floors and alongside a wagon carriage from a train identified as being one similar to those used by the Nazis to deport their victims. The display opposite the carriage is dedicated to illustrating the processes of deportation. The museum resists allowing the carriage to stand alone or to allow visitors access to the inside of the carriage. Instead the effect is created of being able to move through and be surrounded by the walls of the carriage. This mirrors the design and layout of the railway wagon display in the Washington museum: here too there is a moment where visitors are offered what has been described as a 'less than obvious way around the railcar' but otherwise must pass through it – indeed it 'is thrust in the path of the museum-goer'.[65] Undoubtedly the train is one of the most recognisable and powerful symbols of the destruction process – again of the process itself, not of the lives of those affected by it. The use of such train carriages in both American Holocaust museums and at Yad Vashem illustrates the extent to which they have become 'icons' of Holocaust representation.[66] Yet there remain questions regarding the London museum's decision to include such an item in the display. The intended effect could not have been to allow visitors to experience the realities of a journey inside such a train. However, the darkness, the wooden floors and the

[64] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, (Victor Gollancz, London, 1943).
[65] Oren Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust, p.34.
[66] ibid, p.24.

presence of subtle design techniques that allow the visitor glimpses from within the carriage of the large model of Auschwitz Birkenau that dominates the next display may further suggest the potentially troubling consequences of a meeting between the Holocaust and the modern museum. Perhaps in a move that deserves the Jewish Chronicle's praise of the understated and 'fitting' nature of this exhibit, the museum does not go as far as some of its American counterparts in the use of the train carriage. There is not for example, as there is in the Florida Holocaust Museum, an opportunity for visitors to purchase an 'artist's impression' of the carriage from the museum's website.[67] In London in a section where they are accompanied by multiple sources of information and where proof positive of an experience that still remains difficult to absorb seems to be considered vital, the voices of the survivors return as memories of deportation and arrival are recounted. The partnership between the artefact and the voices of the survivor is, according to Stier, vital in the mediation of the museum's narrative: 'the construction of tradition and of the remembering community constituted around the museum's artefacts does not happen by itself but depends on amplification through accounts and reminisces'.[68] The extent to which visitors actually make that connection between the words of the survivors and the object as opposed to being distracted by the symbolic and even sacred status with which they (and organised Holocaust remembrance today) have imbued the object displayed, is questionable.

Auschwitz

The large model of Auschwitz Birkenau detailing the arrival and 'selection' of a group of Hungarian Jews in 1944 is another of the 'attractions' to which the museum's accompanying literature points. Auschwitz, in keeping with its increasingly central status in Holocaust studies and remembrance, is given precedence in the section dealing with destruction in the camps. Later it is Belsen that takes centre stage in the account of liberation, just as it had done in 1945. Before the liberation exhibit, it is intended that the visitor view the stark white model of the extermination camp as they listen to recordings of Auschwitz survivor testimonies. What the model serves to achieve is debatable. The visitor may perhaps gain some sense of the layout of the camp. It must be remembered however that the model is only of Birkenau, or

[67] Oren Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust, p.35.
[68] ibid, p.117.

Auschwitz Two. The model has 'frozen' time in the Auschwitz Birkenau of 1944 and thus the fluid identity of the camp itself and of its own development is not explored. As a result we are returned to the difficult question of the extent to which the place and 'complex and multi layered history'[69] of camps like Auschwitz and Belsen in the development, history and memory of the Final Solution' is ever fully considered in these exhibits.

Photographs of the senior Nazis who worked at Auschwitz are recessed into the surrounding walls. There are included images of gas chambers, of prisoners and examples of camp uniforms. Beyond the camp model the visitor is met with a large wall containing the individually lit registration photographs of Auschwitz inmates. The images illustrate the diverse age groups of the prisoners but they go no further in identifying them or their possible backgrounds. Here the voices of survivors tell of their arrival and experiences in the camp system. The central artefact for this display is the wagon taken from the quarry at the Mauthausen camp that is again referred to in the museum literature. A photograph of Mauthausen stands behind the wagon that is otherwise alone in the space.

Cabinets containing the shoes and personal belongings of the camp's victims flank the model of Auschwitz Birkenau. These are a small proportion of the belongings that are stored and displayed at the site of the Auschwitz One camp in Poland today. As with the use of the ghetto wagon and the surgical table, questions may be raised with regard to the necessity of the inclusion of these items. Why bring these shoes to a museum in London? What is it that the museum believes they can contribute to a visitor's understanding of, and engagement with a model of Auschwitz Birkenau in 1944? The museum is confronted with the challenge of returning a degree of personal experience and of individuality to an event and a place using only the symbols of destruction. And yet the inclusion of such items may signal the museum's recognition that, as with the centrality of the name Auschwitz (even if that is not always accompanied by any knowledge of the workings of the camp) some elements of the Holocaust have taken on a symbolic status and as such may be *expected* by any visitor to any exhibit purporting to represent the Holocaust. It is the image of the piles of

[69] Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business to This Shoah Business', p.14.

shoes that is used by the museum to advertise the exhibition. The shoes have taken on a similar status to that of the railway carriages in the minds of both museum curators and visitors. Their gradual development into *icons* of the Holocaust can be traced to some of the earliest reports from liberated concentration and extermination camps in which soldiers and correspondents expressed their horror at witnessing the abandoned piles of shoes and clothing. For example, in 1944 the Time- Life reporter Richard Lauterbach saw the remnants of prisoners' belongings at Majdanek; 'I stepped up and went inside. It was full of shoes. A sea of shoes. I walked across them unsteadily. They were piled, like pieces of coal in a bin, halfway up the walls. Not only shoes. Boots. Rubbers. Leggings. Slippers. Children's shoes, soldier's shoes, old shoes, new shoes.'[70] The shoes' status as Holocaust artefacts is further endorsed in the minds of the visitor by their display within what are perceived to be the culturally and intellectually sound confines of the museum. If we are to conclude that 'the aura of sacredness permeates Holocaust museology' then the implications of the increasingly sacred status given to these objects are not only limited to a museum's desire to fulfil the expectations of their visitors.[71] The use of the railway cars and of the shoes may also limit the extent to which users of these museums may feel able to criticise or question the exhibitions' content, display and motivation: a concern that has always accompanied the arguments regarding the *uniqueness* of the Holocaust.

Rescue, Hiding and Resistance

There is a distinct change in lighting and in atmosphere in the sections dealing with Rescue, Hiding and Resistance. The third of the 'News Reaches Britain' displays is located here. The accompanying narrative notes that the British government was aware of the situation in Europe from 1943. Included are examples of publications made by the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror. There is little opportunity for the visitor to piece together the roots of that organisation or to appreciate how singular their actions were in the Britain of the 1930s and during the war years. The individuals at the heart of this group and at the forefront of calls for British action remain at the margins of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. For example, Tony Kushner has commented on the complete lack of critical response to

[70] Richard Lauterbach, 'Murder Inc', Time, 11 September 1944, p.36 and cited in Oren Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust, p.31.
[71] Oren Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust, p.120.

Colin Richmond's recent biography of James Parkes and of the limited comment on Eleanor Rathbone's rescue work in Susan Pederson's 2004 biography of Rathbone.[72] The question of rescue is dealt with in the Imperial War Museum's exhibition by a focus on individual and exceptional cases of action. Foremost amongst these is the story of Oskar Schindler. The museum also makes reference to the actions of Frank Foley. Foley is now frequently described as 'Britain's own Schindler' illustrating the extent to which Schindler, and perhaps more specifically, Spielberg's Schindler, has become the benchmark for comparison in any discussion of rescue today. The comparisons between the representation of Foley's act of rescue and that of the campaigns and publications of the members of the National Committee may be revealing. The quest to discover an example of British involvement in anything as essentially positive as rescue is consistent with Britain's perceived status as a liberating nation, a crucial aspect of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. The activity of the National Committee, involving difficult questions of British state response and regarding British levels of knowledge and understanding that may challenge the clear and controlled representation of Britain's connection to the Holocaust are more difficult to confront than the individual and less challenging nature of Foley's independent act of rescue. As such, an account of Foley's work sits comfortably at the beginning of a section of the exhibit that focuses on the event at the core of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust; the liberation of the concentration camps. The actions of the British government in response to calls for rescue are explained to the present day British public in much the same way as they were then, because as James Young reminds us, 'memorials and museums constructed to recall the Holocaust remember events according to the cue of national ideals'.[73] Then and now, British retribution through victory for *all* of Hitler's victims represents the best policy.

'Discovery': The Holocaust Exhibition, Liberation and Britishness

In the section of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition entitled 'Discovery' we return to the liberation of Bergen Belsen and to the liberation year of 1945 that

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[72] See Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business to This Shoah Business', p.34 and Colin Richmond, Campaigner Against Anti Semitism: The Reverend James Parkes 1896 – 1981, (Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2005) and Susan Pederson, Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004).

[73] James Young, The Texture of Memory, Introduction.

defines Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Standing in a liberated Belsen Gunner Illingworth, a Belsen liberator, tells visitors that at the moment of Belsen's liberation 'he realised what he was fighting for'. His words were also included in the reports and films that went home to the British public in 1945 and were drawn upon, as we have seen in the *Introduction* to this study, in the 2005 article by Roger Boyes of The Times that marked the sixtieth anniversary of Britain's liberation of Belsen.[74] If the museum visitor lingers long enough in this section it is likely that they will hear Illingworth's words more than once as they are played on a loop. Now, as then, the soldier's few words and the image of his presence in the liberated camp confirmed the moral justification for Britain's involvement in the Second World War.

When combined with the images and artefacts of this aspect of the exhibition the word 'Discovery' generates the impression that the British had no conception of the possible consequences of Nazi action until 1945. 'Discovery' is an act carried out and experienced by others, by the Allied troops of 1945. In this section of the exhibition the Holocaust's survivors, victims and to a certain extent, even its perpetrators exist at the margins of the representation. They become secondary to the tale of 'Discovery' and to the representation and memories of the nation that made that 'Discovery'. Survivors' testimony briefly raises some of the complexities of the liberation experience that this study has considered in *Chapter Two*: the shock, the continued presence of illness, the beginnings of a sense of guilt and the struggles to return to what had been home. However, in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition the images of Allied soldiers, not least that of Bergen Belsen's bulldozer driver, emphasise the struggles of liberation *for the liberators.*[75]

The 'Discovery' exhibit is dominated by the huge image of a British soldier using a bulldozer to move corpses in the liberated Belsen. The image is, as Tony Kushner has noted, 'the biggest by far in the whole display'.[76] For Britain, photographs and film of the liberated Belsen continue to define the country's understanding of the Holocaust

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[74] See the *Introduction* to this study in which the complicated relationship between Britain, Belsen and its liberation is explored through an analysis of Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain', The Times, 16 April 2005.
[75] See the *Introduction* to this study and The Times article that refers to the long-term emotional damage of the Belsen experience for one liberating soldier who also drove the bulldozers that were used by the British forces to move corpses in the camp.
[76] Tony Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business to This Shoah Business', p.26.

and the British connection to it, just as they did in 1945. As previously explored, those images were the first point of contact that the people of Britain had with the consequences of the destruction process in Europe. In a study of the concentration camp images of 1945, Hannah Caven has reminded us that 'it is easy to forget the impact that these images had on the unsuspecting public that saw them for the first time and the subsequent answers that they must have demanded'.[77] The extent to which the controlled narrative and the climate of the museum, not to mention the effects of a twenty first century media saturated with atrocity imagery, actually allows for such a process of questioning in the viewer of these images today is open to debate. The impact of a world where we are often 'co-presents' to the act of genocide needs to be accounted for in any assessment of a viewer or museum visitor's true understanding of what it is they are seeing.[78] However, the way in which these images were interpreted in 1945 certainly laid down the foundations for Britain's relationship with Belsen.[79] That relationship as we have seen, not least in the use of such images in the coverage of the 60th anniversary of Belsen's liberation, was to be the defining force in the construction of Britain's *own* Holocaust.

But why use that particular photograph of Belsen in the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition? The photograph represents a single act of liberation. It is not representative of the liberation experience as a whole. It represents but one, unique moment in Belsen's own liberation and in the history of the camp. The dominance of that particular image in this exhibition not only makes clear the continued centrality of Belsen in British liberator identity. The picture also proves how the representation of Belsen in a British context, both during and since 1945, can be used to trace the development of Britain's *own* construction of the Holocaust. There is only one person alive in the photograph, only one person clothed, only one person whom it might be possible to name: the British soldier. The visitor is fixed upon the image of the British soldier. The perpetrators of the crime are absent. The survivors of the crime do not

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[77] Hannah Caven, 'Horror In Our Time: Images of the Concentration Camps in the British Media, 1945', in Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, (Volume 21, Number 3, 2001), p.205.
[78] Tony Kushner, 'Pissing in the Wind? The Search for Nuance in the Study of Holocaust "Bystanders", in David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), 'Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation, (Frank Cass, London, 2002), p.60.
[79] With regard to the use, representation and impact of liberation images as 'atrocity' photographs, see Barbie Zelizer, Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye, (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1998).

stand and stare as in so many other images of liberated camps, their very existence posing challenging questions about the role in relation to the destruction process of the liberators or indeed of the Allies as a whole. The victims of the crime remain nameless and faceless in this image. The fact that circumstances in Belsen's history had ensured that by the time of its liberation the majority of its sixty thousand prisoners were Jewish remains as much without comment in this image as it had in the many other similar photographs presented to the British public in 1945.[80] The sight of a bulldozer moving corpses makes it even more difficult to grant the victims or survivors any degree of humanity. Their personal lives and experiences, the 'mythoi' of their past lives that Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel sought through the testimonies that are explored in *Chapter Two,* are beyond trace in this image.[81] If the visitor connects with the victims pictured in this scene it is arguably only through a shock at the mechanised nature of the removal of their corpses. The museum might argue that there is no way of telling from looking at the photograph that this is a British soldier. Arguably that assertion underestimates the *shared* experience of the Second World War in British society. Not least because an ever developing interest in all things relating to the 1940s in Britain would make the identification of the soldier's uniform a fairly simple task for most British visitors, and when you consider the very real possibility that they have visited other sections of the Imperial War Museum prior to the Holocaust Exhibit and thus will have almost certainly seen the same uniform on display, Furthermore the assertion that the soldier remains anonymous might underestimate the place that the images of the act of liberation (and not just of Belsen's liberation) hold in British memory: ultimately Britain's continued perception of itself as a liberating nation may allow for the possibility that the Britishness of the soldier in the picture is simply *assumed* by the British museum visitor. If, as Barbie Zelizer comments, 'visualising atrocity lends perspective, positions boundaries, and concretises standards of appropriate behaviour in a so called civilised world'[82], then this photograph may actually have a dual impact on the museum visitor. That double-layered response at first seems difficult to contend with, but it may be the very thing that connects their response to those of the people of Britain in 1945. The first thing that links the British museum visitor of today to the British people of 1945 in terms of

[80] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps, (Batsford, London, 1990).
[81] Primo Levi, If This is a Man, (Vintage, London, 1996) and Elie Wiesel, Night, (Penguin, London, 1981).
[82] Barbie Zelizer, Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye, p.238.

the imagery of liberation is the controlled and managed use of the bulldozer image. Just as in 1945, this photograph does not come to the museum visiting British public in isolation. In 1945 images such as these were *used* and managed to reinforce the British public's belief in the guilt and moral degradation of the Germans and the moral validity of Allied activity. Today, the image is *used* and controlled by the museum to create an effect and to generate a response in the visitor. What binds the usage of this photograph and of other liberation imagery in Britain over more than sixty years is a narrative of Britishness that still determines the story that these images tell.

The exhibition's photograph will shock, just as it did in 1945. It will also *reassure* – again, just as it did in 1945. The image includes a mass of corpses and is testament to an appalling act of destruction. How can it offer reassurance? Now and then, Britain's 'culturally safe' narrative of national identity means that the picture also signals a moment of control, of order and of an attempt (by a British soldier) to put things *right*. There is no chaos in this photograph: there is only conclusion. Something horrendous has happened, but it is over and there are the means, even if they involve the use of a bulldozer, to deal with its consequences. The horrors of the images of liberation will always vie with a sense of relief, of the positive and of a desire to look to the possibility of a future; that response is shared by the war weary British public of 1945 and the (British) visitor to the Imperial War Museum in the twenty first century. The location of this image, its scale and its central focus on the actions of the British ensures that the museum visitor can cope with, make sense of, and even find some relief in the liberation section of this exhibition: they can bring all that they have seen before under the 'cognitive control' offered by a notion of Britishness.

The chronological approach of the museum demands that the section of the exhibit dealing with liberation be located towards its final stages. It is noteworthy here that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C positions its own liberation display at the beginning of its exhibition: thus the American visitor is confronted with a confirmation of the liberating status of their nation from the outset. It is arguable that the location of the American museum in the heart of the country's capital city and surrounded by the monuments and statements that define notions of American national identity makes any such confirmation unnecessary. And yet as

countries like Britain and America continue to search for a degree of 'cognitive control' over the Holocaust, as they continue to construct versions of the Holocaust in keeping with their own national narratives, these expressions of national identity remain vital. On a purely practical level, the visitor to the London exhibition, who may have spent upwards of two hours surrounded by the details of the destruction process, may feel unable or unwilling to spend a significant amount of time in the concluding sections of the exhibit. The location of London's liberation section may also suggest a positive or neat conclusion to both the exhibit and to the Holocaust itself. It is not the images of the liberation process included beforehand that might imply a positive ending in the mind of the visitor: in their face value content these images are, just as they were in 1945, unwaveringly traumatic and challenging. It is, however, the connections that are made in the mind of the present day British visitor between the act of liberation and the meaning of 1945 that may allow for that sense of relief, of the possibility of a more positive outcome. For Britain then and now, this is a year of multiple 'liberations', of long awaited conclusions and ultimately of victory. This is the year whose significant anniversaries have been marked with extensive commemorations and increasingly nostalgic attempts to recapture the 'spirit', the Britishness of the original: a process most evident perhaps during the atrocity scared summer of 2005 – the year that also marked the sixtieth anniversary of Bergen Belsen's liberation.[83]

However, the Imperial War Museum resists bringing the Holocaust exhibition to a complete close at the point of liberation. Instead after a perhaps necessarily brief consideration of the Nuremberg Trials, the testimony of survivors recounting their post war lives is presented to the visitor in a small final exhibit space. And thus, it may be argued that the voices of those whose lives were defined by this event, are given the last word in this British Holocaust exhibition. Museum visitors are offered the opportunity to sit at this stage and to listen to survivors account for the experience of survivorship. The amount of time weary visitors give to these testimonies may limit their ability to engage with the evidence of the continued trauma and individual struggles that survival has created for the individuals featured. The positioning of testimonies that most importantly confirm the very fact that the Holocaust did not end

[83] See Mark Connelly's work on the connection between Britain's national identity and the years of the Second World War, as explored in *Chapter Three* of this study.

with the liberation of the camps, that survival itself represents the continuation of that experience must nonetheless battle with the sense of a conclusion, of having reached an ending that their location within the exhibition still implies to its visitors; not just an ending, but a positive one as well. The use of this testimony at this final stage and in such close proximity to the section on liberation also confirms to the British visitor that there *were* survivors, that British action in camps like Bergen Belsen *was* that of a liberating nation. At the conclusion to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, the line between victor, perpetrator and survivor is made reassuringly clear.

Visitor's Thoughts

On leaving the exhibit visitors are offered the opportunity to record their thoughts. The literature that accompanies the exhibition includes references to these comments. The act of taking comments and thoughts from visitors may reflect a general trend in Britain towards the public expression of feeling that has marked recent major events. An example of the first of these occasions to signal a change in British public behaviour and particularly in the expression of emotion in public might be found in the national response to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. The visitor comments in themselves reflect many of the trends in terms of the perception and role of the modern museum identified in the museology discussed earlier. For example, a visitor to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition writes, 'You will never let them say "it never happened". Do not close this exhibition – we should all see and weep.'[84] The words of the visitor suggest the level of responsibility that its users see in the museum. They also hint at the notion that it should be considered a social duty to make a visit to an exhibit like this and that the exhibit may play a role in combating Holocaust denial. Many associate the responsibility of the museum with the education of the young: 'Hopefully my children will never be prejudiced against another race or colour.' That belief in the exhibition's educational capabilities represents an extension of the visitor's belief in the museum as a whole as a site of learning. Britain too may be represented as an educator through an exhibition like this: 'my thanks to all who put together this impressive memorial. I live in Vienna and would dearly like to make it possible for as many Austrians as possible to visit this.' Now, as in 1945, Britain's

[84] Imperial War Museum, 'Visitor Reactions.' Now accessible via the museum's website at www.iwm.org.uk

relationship with this event enables the country to be cast in the role of the moral educator. Visitors are emotional and overwhelmingly positive in their responses; 'this is the most stunning exhibition I have ever seen. It moved me to tears' and 'without fail, the best exhibition I have ever seen. Chilling in the extreme. No hatred could ever have been imagined than that which has been committed' and 'This is the most stunning exhibition I have ever seen. It moved me to tears.' A concern for neutrality and a desire to avoid what was regarded as the politicisation of the Holocaust was a feature of much of the discussion surrounding the exhibit. Much of the praise the exhibit garnered was based on a belief that, as according to the Wiener Library volunteers, 'the facts were presented without any obvious political slant or polemical intention'.[85] For many visitors the exhibition has *become* the Holocaust in their minds. It is with the representation of Britain's *own* construction of the Holocaust that they make this powerful connection. And yet, the existence of this nationally determined narrative remains unapparent to many, so that one visitor comments, 'the most outstanding Holocaust exhibition I have ever seen – showed in a neutral, informative way that pulls no punches'. This huge British Holocaust exhibition located in the Imperial War Museum in central London is informative, it is richly detailed, it shocks and it challenges. It also confirms, reassures and attempts to diffuse the disruptive and disturbing nature of the event that it tries to constrain within its walls. As such it tells us more about Britain's continuing search for 'cognitive control' over the Holocaust than it does about the events of the Holocaust alone. What it is not and never could have been is *neutral.* It is simply Britain's *own* Holocaust Exhibition.

[85] 'Holocaust Exhibit Opens at the War Museum', Wiener Library News Bulletin , p.2.

Conclusion

Eleanor Rathbone was rarely deterred by continued attempts to deflect attention from any one of her many parliamentary questions regarding the destruction of European Jewry. In 1943 she told the House of Commons the reason why her questions on that subject mattered. As far as she was concerned the reason was simple; 'My question applies to this country.'[1] And she was right. The Holocaust is part of 'us.' For Britain that statement goes further than a share in the widely acknowledged importance of recognising the universal humanitarian implications of the Holocaust. Since 1933 Britain has been engaged in a relationship with the destruction of European Jewry that has seen the construction, representation and memory of a version of the Holocaust that has been and continues to be filtered through the prism of British national identity. Seeking to bring the events in Europe under the 'cognitive control' offered by their own national narrative, Britain and the British people, then and now, have drawn the Holocaust within the familiar and reassuring parameters of Britishness.[2] Britain's search for 'cognitive control' – that is, for a means to respond to, understand and remember the Holocaust - has placed Britishness and what British identity *means* at the centre of this study. Britain's encounter with the Holocaust has and continues to expose the rich and complicated nature of British identity so that an exploration of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust is an exploration of Britain's relationship with itself.

The aim of this inter-disciplinary study has been to trace through a close reading of sources the presence and impact of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust in the lives of British people, both then and now; to illustrate that through the words, thoughts, actions and memories of a diverse range of British individuals and groups, it is possible to witness the impact of a meeting between notions of national identity and the destruction of European Jewry. The active and ongoing link between Britain and the Holocaust is played out in the lives of ordinary British people – pro-refugee campaigners, writers, television and filmmakers, journalists, liberators, and museum visitors. A focus on the finer detail - the choice of a word, the title of an article, the

[1] Eleanor Rathbone, Parliamentary Question, 'Jews and Other Refugees' (Admission to the United Kingdom), Hansard, House of Commons, Volume 386, 11 February 1943.
[2] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence; Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain, 1945-6' in Patterns of Prejudice, (Volume 33, Number 2, 1999), pp.13-29.

actions of an individual or the representation of a particular museum artefact - has revealed in Britain a country still actively connected to the destruction of Europe's Jews through the continued and varied reactions of its people. That 'close reading' of distinctive and revealing examples, often drawn from literary and cultural sources, moves this study beyond British state responses to the Holocaust to prioritise instead the connections between the destruction of Europe's Jews and the British people.

The Holocaust, unfamiliar, disruptive and without context, not only challenges and disturbs the individual but has the capacity to do the same to a nation. That challenge makes it necessary for a nation to return to its own reassuring 'culturally familiar narratives' and to draw upon the events, names, histories and memories by which it defines itself and its place in the world.[3] And yet, the Holocaust consistently tests those narratives of national identity and belonging, making their constant repetition, refinement and adaptation a necessity if they are ever to offer a people or a country a source of 'cognitive control' over the inexplicable. In Britain, that test and the desire to domesticate and control the Holocaust have often been so extreme as to necessitate the creation of an even more intense prism of Britishness. During the 1930s and 1940s pro-refugee campaigners and groups such as the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror relied on their conception of British 'honour and sincerity' to argue for the relief and rescue of Europe's Jews.[4] For British individuals such as Eleanor Rathbone and James Parkes, their interpretation of a British liberal ideology made British action on behalf of the persecuted a necessity. They never wavered in their belief that British involvement in the relief and rescue of Europe's Jews represented the best expression of their nation's values. In turn, perceptions of the British soldier's strength of character, the fair play of the British liberating army, and the decency of the British general public provided the best point of contrast with the barbarities of the German perpetrators during the liberation year of 1945. Britain's liberation of Bergen Belsen and the representation of that event today in the media and in the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition created and sustain an image of Britain as a liberating nation. In the face of the destruction of European Jewry, many in Britain have been and continue to be forced to rely on an increasingly narrow understanding

[3] Dan Stone, 'The Domestication of Violence', p.13.
[4] James Parkes, 'The Massacre of the Jews – Future Vengeance or Present Help?' (unpublished), January 1943, (MS 60 9/5/1 Parkes Papers, University of Southampton Special Collections).

of national identity. In response to the Holocaust and to the need for 'cognitive control', Britishness has often been replaced by Englishness or rather a form of Englishness that is grounded in the rural, idyllic and symbolic imagery of an England found in the works of poets, painters and playwrights. Britain's relationship with the Holocaust has meant that writers, pro-refugee campaigners, and liberating soldiers have chosen the word 'England' in place of 'Britain', that the nation's island status has been invoked and romanticised and that the physical landscape has been imbued with meaning and intertwined with an apparently unbroken narrative of English history and identity. At each stage of their response to the destruction of Jewish life in Europe, ordinary British people have fallen back on their own interpretation of what it means to be British. The destabilising impact of the Holocaust has forced Britain to define itself.

In 1945 the British people became members of a liberating nation. The liberation of Bergen Belsen by British troops in April 1945 placed the camp and the act of liberation at the centre of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Belsen entered British consciousness as the surest proof of German atrocity and of the moral validity of the Second World War. British responses to the liberation of the camp saw the failure to make any distinction between the 'Germans' and the Nazis. Notions of national identity – of Germanness, Britishness, or so often, of Englishness, - became the clearest means by which to distinguish the victor from the vanquished, the liberator from the perpetrator. The writing of liberator Dirk Bogarde,[5] for example, exposed the importance of Englishness in just one individual's complicated memory of the camp whose liberation, The Times argued in 2005, had 'put the Holocaust on British kitchen tables.'[6] In 1945 Britishness provided the benchmark against which any past or future German behaviour was measured. The identities of the victims and survivors of Belsen were secondary to the role that the liberated camp played in reinforcing a version of Britishness that offered the British the 'cognitive control' they sought. And yet, as Britain has attempted to build its own construction of the Holocaust, the words of those liberated at Bergen Belsen and of other Holocaust survivors have continued to challenge and undermine that process. A change in

[5] Dirk Bogarde, 'Out of the Shadows of Hell', The Daily Telegraph, 26 November 1988. See also Dirk Bogarde, For the Time Being: Collected Journalism, (Viking, London, 1998), p.143.
[6] Roger Boyes, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain', The Times, 16 April 2005.

perspective from the liberators to the liberated provides an alternative vision of the liberation experience and proof of the contribution of testimony to the study of the Holocaust. Liberators and survivors shared the moment of liberation. Their memories of that time differ significantly. As *Chapter Two* has explored, the unique dynamics of Holocaust survivor testimony have tested the constructions and memories of the Holocaust in countries such as Britain and America. Itself a product and a part of the Holocaust, survivor testimony has posed difficult questions regarding belonging, notions of home and of identity that still threaten to disrupt Britain's search for 'cognitive control.' An attempt to draw the Holocaust within the reassuring parameters of Britishness has meant a struggle to contain and control the words of those for whom the Holocaust was not only a part, but also *the* defining moment in their lives. The search for 'cognitive control' for survivors is a radically different one from that which shapes Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. Today, the use and representation of survivor testimony, in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition for example, remains a signpost for the complicated relationship between the event that created testimony and Britain itself.

Intimately connected to notions of British national identity, the events and memory of the Second World War continue to influence Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. 1945 not only marked the first meeting point between the British public and the physical consequences of the Nazi extermination policy in the liberation of Bergen Belsen. 1945 also saw Britain's liberation from a state of war. If Britain's search for 'cognitive control' in the face of the destruction of European Jewry was based on an attempt to draw that event within a narrative of British, or Englishness, then the way in which Britain represents and remembers the Second World War is at the centre of this country's relationship with the Holocaust. Created in the climate of 1945, some of Britain's first responses to the liberation of the concentration camps were infused with the patriotism, self-confidence and, crucially, a desire to look to the future that military victory created. Throughout 1945 British newspaper editors and readers reacted to the images of liberated concentration camps with shock and disgust. British sympathy for the camp's victims coexisted with a universalism that failed to highlight the Jewishness of the majority of victims and survivors. Virulent anti-German hostility existed alongside British musings on the German mentality and the future of the German people. The work of journalists Richard Dimbleby and Alan

Moorehead combined an intense shock at the sight of Belsen with a need to return to the security offered by the history and landscape of an England at peace or the stoicism and humour of the British soldier.[7] Today visitors to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition are also surrounded by the history and memory of Britain's involvement in military conflict and by the military hardware that is bestowed with iconic status by Britain's wartime memory. The liberation year also prompted difficult questions for Britain's Jewish community. Insecurity, internal strife and minority status had left British Jews attempting to balance their Britishness and their Jewishness as the destruction in Europe continued. In 1945 the images of the liberated camps confirmed their worst fears and prompted a need for 'cognitive control' that also lead British Jews away from the camps and their meaning, to a search for a reassuring explanation in a Jewish past or for a hopeful distraction in a new Jewish future. As *Chapter Three* has explored, the liberation of Bergen Belsen was drawn into the British 'national story', becoming part of a British national narrative and memory in which the Second World War remains the defining force.[8]

The nature of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust has proved that there have always been multiple definitions of Britishness, of British identity and that these are as diverse as the British people whose lives provide the starting point for this thesis. Britain's connection to the destruction of European Jewry cannot be constrained by the term 'bystander to the Holocaust.'[9] When British people are confronted with the Holocaust, Britishness, however it is defined, has provided answers, offered comparisons and contrasts, and has been a source of reassurance in the face of the horror. It has represented a principle, an example, and a means by which to understand the inexplicable. A study of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust therefore makes an equal contribution to the history of the Holocaust and to the history of British identity. Why? Because then and now, the Holocaust 'applies to this country'.

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[7] Richard Dimbleby, 'The Cesspit Beneath', Belsen 19 April 1945. Reproduced in Leonard Miall, (ed), Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster – By His Colleagues, (BBC, London, 1966), p.44 and Alan Moorehead, 'Belsen', in Cyril Connelly, (ed), The Golden Horizon, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1953), p.103.

[8] See Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Pearson Longman, London, 2004).

[9] See for example, David Cesarani and Paul Levine, (eds), Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation, (Frank Cass, London, 2002).

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