Learning from the past ~ lessons for today

The Holocaust Memorial Day Committee in association with
The Department of Justice and Equality, Dublin City Council,
Dublin Maccabi Charitable Trust,
Jewish Representative Council of Ireland,
Sisters of St Joseph, Council for Christians and Jews
The only public Holocaust memorial monument in Ireland was unveiled in The Garden of Europe in Listowel Co Kerry in May 1995. The occasion marked fifty years since the end of World War II when the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed. Paddy Fitzgibbon, of the Rotary Club of Listowel, made a very moving speech on that occasion; an excerpt is printed below:

Our generation, and the generation or two after us, will be the last that will be able to say that we stood and shook the hands of some of those who survived. Go home from this place and tell your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren that today in Listowel, you looked into eyes that witnessed the most cataclysmic events ever unleashed by mankind upon mankind. Tell them that you met people who will still be remembered and still talked about and still wept over 10,000 years from now – because if they are not, there will be no hope for us at all. The Holocaust happened and it can happen again, and every one of us, if only out of our own sense of self-preservation, has a solemn duty to ensure that nothing like it ever occurs again.

**Holocaust Memorial Day**

The Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration is designed to cherish the memory of all of the victims of the Nazi Holocaust. A candle-lighting ceremony is an integral part of the commemoration at which six candles are always lit for the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, as well as candles for all of the other victims of the Nazis. The commemoration serves as a constant reminder of the dangers of racism and intolerance and provides lessons from the past that are relevant today.

**Summary of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust**

Issued in January 2000, on the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945 and endorsed by all participating countries, including Ireland.

We, the governments attending the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, recognise that the Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th century, a crisis for European civilisation and a universal catastrophe for humanity. In declaring that the Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation, we share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, and to honour those who stood against it. The horrors that engulfed the Jewish people and other victims of the Nazis must forever be seared in our collective memory. With humanity still scarred by genocide, antisemitism, ethnic cleansing, racism, xenophobia and other expressions of hatred and discrimination, we share a solemn responsibility to fight against these evils. Together with our European partners and the wider international community, we share a commitment to remember the victims who perished, to respect the survivors still with us, and to reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for a democratic and tolerant society, free of the evils of prejudice and other forms of bigotry.

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Message from President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins

I would like to send my best wishes to Holocaust Education Trust Ireland on the 10th National Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration.

The Holocaust marked a terrible and dark moment in world history; a moment of gross inhumanity and of cruel disregard for the rights of others. It was an atrocity born of intolerance and arrogance, an act of evil that grew out of the dangerous belief that some people are born better than others, are entitled to set themselves above those whom they consider their inferiors. It was also an atrocity that showed the world the dangers of remaining indifferent, of looking the other way, of not speaking out against injustice, discrimination, cruelty and prejudice.

The Holocaust, and its terrible legacy, has taught us many important lessons. Holocaust Education Trust Ireland plays a crucial role in ensuring that these lessons will not be forgotten and that the memory of the Holocaust be passed on to future generations. By commemorating that shameful event, honouring the memory of its victims and highlighting the need for education and awareness of all forms of intolerance we can help to ensure that we will never let it happen again.

I thank Holocaust Education Trust Ireland for their crucial work in ensuring that future generations will grow as part of an inclusive society; one that welcomes diversity and recognises the rights of all its citizens to an equal role and an equal voice.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland

Message from Lord Mayor of Dublin Andrew Montague

It is a great honour for me to host this important national event on behalf of the City and people of Dublin. Held annually on the nearest Sunday to the 27th of January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945, it is an important date in the calendar of the city.

Today we recall the suffering inflicted on the Jewish people, and those of other faiths, during the Holocaust and we repeat our determination that such acts of inhumanity should never happen again.

I especially welcome here today survivors and descendants of survivors of the Holocaust who have made Dublin and Ireland their home. Dublin has enjoyed a proud history with the Jewish Community here for more than 150 years and this Community has made a remarkable contribution to Dublin and Irish life.

I call on all here present to remember all those who died during the Holocaust. It is important that they are not forgotten and the lessons of history are not unheeded.

I thank Holocaust Education Trust Ireland for their hard work throughout the year and in particular for organising this solemn event today.

Andrew Montague
Lord Mayor of Dublin
During the Holocaust, six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators of whom one and a half million were children. The Nazis particularly targeted the children in an attempt to destroy the future of the Jewish people. Other groups were also targeted: people with mental and physical disabilities, Poles, Slavs, ethnic and mixed race people, Roma, homosexuals, political opponents of the regime, Jehovah’s witnesses, Christians of all denominations, and thousands of people who risked their lives to save Jews.
10th National Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration
Sunday 29 January 2012
Mansion House, Dublin 2

Programme

MC: Yanky Fachler    Music: Feilimidh Nunan and Maria Geheran

• Introductory remarks: Yanky Fachler
• Words of Welcome: Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr Andrew Montague

Keynote Address: President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins

• The Wannsee Conference: Alan Shatter TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence
• The Stockholm Declaration: Lucinda Creighton TD, Minister of State for European Affairs

Musical interlude

• Destruction of Jewish culture: Ingrid Craigie, actor
• Evian: Anastasia Crickley, National University of Ireland Maynooth and member of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
• Holocaust survivor: Zoltan Zinn-Collis
• Kristallnacht: Brigid McManus, Secretary General, Department of Education and Skills
• “Shoah”: Maire Mhac an tSaoi
• Ghettoes: Vincent Norton, Executive Manager, Dublin City Council
• Slave Labour: Liberation: Maurice Cohen, Chairman, Jewish Representative Council of Ireland
• Camp Orchestras: Deborah Kelleher, Director, Royal Irish Academy of Music
• Holocaust survivor: Jan Kaminski
• Niemöller: Senan Dunne

Musical interlude

• Victim Readings:
  People with disabilities: Christy Lynch, Chairman, National Federation of Voluntary Organisations Providing Services to People with Intellectual disabilities
  Poles: Joanna Rodziewicz
  Gypsies: Sr Stanislaus Kennedy, Focus Ireland, Immigrant Council of Ireland
  Homosexuals: Brian Merriman of the Equality Authority
  Black and ethnic minorities: Clement Esebamen, Ireland West Africa Business & Economic Council
  Political victims: Fergal McCarthy, Executive Committee, Teachers’ Union of Ireland
  Christian victims: Robert Merriweather, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
  All of the victims: Ronnie Appleton QC, President, Belfast Jewish Community
• Holocaust survivor: Suzi Diamond
• Scroll of Names: Stratford College, Dublin; Gorey Community School, Loreto Foxrock, Larkin Community College

Musical interlude

• Liberation: Eibhlin Byrne, Acting Director, Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services
• Righteous Among the Nations: Gene Lambert, artist
• Universal Lessons: Yvonne Altman O’Connor, Irish Jewish Museum
• Paper Universe: Jennifer Johnston, writer
• Holocaust survivor: Tomi Reichental
• The Horror of the Holocaust: Dermot Lacey
• Second Generation: Riva Neuman
• Go Home from this Place: The Honourable Mrs Justice Susan Denham, Chief Justice

MINUTE’S SILENCE
CANDLE LIGHTING

• El Malay Rachamim: Prayer for the Repose of the Souls of the Departed, Rabbi Zalman Lent, Cantor Alwyn Shulman, Irish Jewish community
• Closing remarks: Yanky Fachler
Jewish Communities

Throughout much of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, only fragmentary remnants of once thriving Jewish communities can be found. These communities, many of them ancient, were systematically destroyed during the Holocaust. The remains illustrate more than two thousand years of vibrant Jewish presence among the nations of the world. Each of the communities - from small village enclaves to large urban centres - is unique in its details and represents one of the countless threads that comprise the rich tapestry of Jewish history.

To understand the extent of the unprecedented crimes committed against the Jewish people in Europe is not enough; one must also seek to understand the life of this people before the catastrophe. In their efforts to destroy the Jewish people and obliterate its memory, the Nazis attempted to destroy Jewish culture created by the Jews in the Diaspora in the course of generations.

The Jewish community became the heart of Jewish life. The exile which cost the Jewish people their political independence and dispersed them in various countries in Asia, Europe and subsequently throughout the whole world, did not result in assimilation or full integration. The Jews often remained apart from the societies that surrounded them – sometimes in their own special quarters and with their own public and religious institutions – and thus became a kind of separate and recognized class of people or group within the political and social orders of the various host countries.

From as early as the Second Temple Period, under the influence of the Greek cities, Jews and their community organisations enjoyed autonomy, also in the land of Israel. Jewish municipalities administered public property, supplied water, took care of town fortifications, maintained the synagogue and public baths, and kept records.

During the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, fully-fledged Jewish community organisations already existed; the community looked after its own health, education and care of the sick and the poor as well as its municipal responsibilities already mentioned. Officers elected or chosen from among the wealthy members of the community or its scholars oversaw the work, which was done by officials such as the market inspector, cantor, scribe, preacher or judge.

The Jews of Babylonia were ruled over by an Exilarch who claimed descent from the House of King David and two Geonim and Jewish religious (halachic) authorities who headed the great yeshivas. Their expertise in interpreting the Bible, Mishnah, and Talmud enabled them to carry on their activities after the Talmud received its final form around 500 CE, their decisions being accepted in the entire Jewish world by the 10th century.

In the 11th – 13th centuries, under the tolerant rule of the Fatimids, Jewish autonomy was strengthened in Egypt, the Land of Israel, and Syria. Under Mamluk rule in the late Middle Ages, Jewish authority in these communities was circumscribed. Perceived as a special religious, social and economic group, the Jews were granted Charters of Rights by local rulers in Medieval Europe. The strength of the community and the extent of its rights depended on the goodwill of its benefactors. Sometimes they were generous and other times they set limits, to the extent even of abrogating these rights altogether and expelling the Jews from their borders.

In Muslim and Christian Spain, the Jews enjoyed broad autonomy until the end of the 15th century, when they were expelled from the country. In the Muslim kingdoms a number of Jewish community heads became quite prominent. In the Christian kingdoms there was a principal community to which Jews from the towns and villages were attached. The heads of the community published halachic directives
governing the responsibilities of the individual toward the community and relations between individuals. The community ran aid services for the sick and needy and the community’s courts tried criminal cases under government authorisation.

Jewish settlements expanded in Western Europe particularly in France and Germany in the 10th - 14th centuries, and community organisation developed commensurately. The community embraced all Jews living within its bounds and exercised authority in every area of public and private life – in religious matters, in protecting the individual and his property, and in mutual aid. To perform its services, it organized a broad range of facilities: synagogues, ritual baths, cemeteries, charity funds, judicial and educational institutions, and agencies for the enforcement of enactments in the public interest. The members of the community saw in these activities an essential condition for preserving the distinct character of the Jewish nation.

However, beginning in the 14th century, the situation of the Jews in Germany and France deteriorated. The Crusades and the Black Death, blood libels, and expulsions led to the decline of the communities. The expulsion of the Jews from France and Germany brought about mass migration to Austria, Bohemia, Moravia and the Kingdom of Poland. Wherever they went, the Jews brought with them the forms of their communal organisation.

It was in the kingdom of Poland-Lithuania that Jewish autonomy reached its peak. The Jews of Poland, who had emigrated from Western Europe primarily in response to the expulsions, took with them examples of charters of rights and these were granted by the Polish and Lithuanian rulers. The Jews were able to develop the organisation of their communities on the basis of these charters and their experience in Western Europe.

In the second half of the 16th century the rulers of Poland-Lithuania became convinced that it would be more effective if the Jews themselves collected state taxes, principally the Head Tax, and authorised countrywide representation. There emerged from within the Council of the Four Lands in the Kingdom of Poland, which included the principal communities of Great Poland, Lesser Poland, Galicia and Volhynia as well as the Council of the Land of Lithuania. The records of council meetings indicate that no area of Jewish life went untouched; if required, directives were issued. In the economic sphere the councils dealt with taxes, residence and work rights, trade restrictions, promissory notes, bankruptcies, etc. For Jews, an important subject was education, especially for needy children and the poor. The councils obliged the larger communities to underwrite education for the poor and to maintain yeshivas. The Councils of the Four Lands continued to exist officially until they were dissolved by the parliament and the king in 1764. Unofficially, some continued to meet until the First Partition of Poland in 1772.

The French Revolution, which reduced the role of religion in civil society, impacted on Jewish communities as autonomous entities, restricting their activities exclusively to religious affairs. Jewish engagement with the wider European community led to the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment movement. In the East, political emancipation moved at a slower pace and the community was abolished in Poland in 1822 and in Russia in 1844, but most of its functions remained in the hands of the existing bodies. In addition to religion they dealt with health, welfare, and education and in the time of Czar Nicholas I, even with military conscription.
Following the February 1917 Revolution, a democratically elected federation of communities was created in Russia for the first time. After the October Revolution of the same year, the Bolsheviks waged war against all religions. As alternatives they set up in the 1920s a Jewish ministry in the Soviet government and a Jewish Section in the Communist Party whose function was to inculcate Communism among the Jews. These too were abolished at the end of the 1920s. Jewish life remained circumscribed within Jewish state institutions for culture and education which was required to follow the Soviet line.

In Poland in the 1930s, between the two world wars, the Jewish community was recognized as a legal corporate body and even authorized to collect taxes from its members. Its activities centred mainly around religious and welfare services while other organisations dealt with health, education and economic affairs. At the local level, these organisations were supported financially by the communities. The awakening of Jewish political life and the consequent proliferation of Jewish political parties led to hard-fought elections for community leadership positions. Economic organisations and trade unions also ran in these elections. Some communities were dominated by Zionist or ultra-Orthodox parties, some by the Jewish labour movement, the Bund. In countries like Romania and Hungary the situation was similar. In Germany the community assumed greater importance after the Nazis came to power. The elimination of Jews from every area of economic and cultural life forced the community to take up these functions and expand its activities, even establishing nationwide organisations. This was the situation until 1938, when the communities were abolished and state-appointed representatives took their place, acting on government instructions.

The Nazi occupation in World War II put an end to Jewish community organisations in Europe. Together with the millions of Jews, the Nazis destroyed numerous synagogues, some of them magnificent and of great architectural value, and Jewish institutions such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, old age homes, libraries and theatres. Tombstones in Jewish cemeteries, some of them quite ancient, were used by the Nazis to pave streets and roads. The aim was to remove all traces of Jewish life going back numerous generations.

Suddenly, all those places where Jews had lived for hundreds of years had vanished. And I thought that in years to come, long after the slaughter, Jews might want to hear about the places which had disappeared, about the life that once was and no longer is.
The Évian Conference

With thousands of Jews fleeing Nazi antisemitism, it was clear that an international refugee crisis had developed. Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, convened an international conference at Évian-les-Bains in France in July 1938 to consider refugee policies. Out of all of the 32 countries represented at the conference, including Ireland, none was willing to take in more Jewish refugees.

The Évian Conference, called to resolve the situation for Jewish refugees, was deemed a failure. Myron Taylor, a retired executive from the US who chaired the meeting, asserted to the delegates that existing American immigration quotas were liberal. Lord Winterton, a member of the British cabinet, said that England was not a country of immigration and that British colonies and territories weren’t either. Canada said: no Jew is too many. A German newspaper said: Jews for Sale – Who Wants Them? No One.

Time magazine said shortly afterward: the hard fact remains that no nation is willing to receive more penniless Jews.

Kristallnacht, 9/10 November 1938, November Pogrom

In November 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a Jewish student in Paris, assassinated the Third Secretary at the German embassy, Ernst Vom Rath. Headlines appeared in the Nazi newspaper Der Angriff that stated, ‘From this vile deed arises the imperative demand to proceed at once against the Jews with the most severe consequences.’ In response to the assassination, the Nazis launched the November pogrom known as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, on 9/10 November 1938.

During that state-sponsored pogrom of violence against the Jews, 7,500 Jewish shops were wrecked and their windows smashed – leaving the streets strewn with glass. Hundreds of synagogues, Jewish homes, schools and businesses were destroyed and set ablaze. Ninety-one Jews were murdered and approximately 30,000 thrown into concentration camps.

The Jewish communities of Germany were fined 1 billion Reichsmarks to pay for the damage!

Kristallnacht provoked outrage abroad and disquiet amongst ordinary Germans. Three days later, one hundred senior Nazi officials gathered to discuss the solutions to the ‘Jewish Question’. They considered plans such as confining Jews in ghettos but finally decided to get them out of the economy and out of the country. At the time, expulsion appeared to them an adequate measure. After Kristallnacht, Jewish businessmen had to sell their businesses at very low prices, employers were urged to sack Jewish workers, and offices were set up to speed emigration.

Kindertransports

Kristallnacht had an instant impact on world public opinion. Within a week, a delegation that included Chief Rabbi Hertz of Great Britain and Chaim Weitzmann, later president of Israel, persuaded the British government to allow Jewish child refugees into Britain. The first Kindertransport train left Berlin via Holland in December 1938. The children arrived in London’s Liverpool Street Station where they were met by their volunteer foster parents or representatives of hostels and boarding schools. Over the next 10 months, almost 10,000 Jewish children aged between two and eighteen years arrived in Britain via the Kindertransports. They came from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Each child clutched a small suitcase holding their most cherished possessions. Most of the children never saw their parents again.

Kindertransport children found refuge in Northern Ireland on a farm in Millisle in County Down where over 200 children aged between three and eighteen years were able to stay and work before moving on after the war.

Geoffrey Phillips escaped from Germany as a thirteen-year-old boy when his parents managed to put him on one of the Kindertransport trains; both of Geoffrey’s parents perished in the Holocaust. He grew up and lived in England where he married Phyllis and they later came to Ireland where they raised their three sons. Geoffrey was ardently proud of his Jewishness about which he was very knowledgeable and well informed. Although he seldom spoke of his childhood experiences, Geoffrey was very mindful of being a living witness to the tragic page in history of the Jewish people. He passed away in August 2011.
**Shoah**

*by Máire Mhac an tSaoi*

Máire Mhac an tSaoi’s poem Shoah was inspired by a visit to Vienna where she saw Alfred Hrdlicka’s Monument against War and Fascism on Albertina Square. The monument depicts an old Jew scrubbing the streets with a nailbrush, a reference to the 1938 Anschluss when Vienna’s Nazi masters rounded up Jews and ordered them to remove anti-Nazi daubings and slogans.

**As Gaeilge**

An seanóir Giúdach ar a cheithre cnámha,
Ualach sneachta ar a ghuailne,
Cianta an rogha ina ghnúis –
’Mar seo,’ adeir an t-lomhá miotail,
’Do sciúr mo chine “leacacha na sráide”
I Wien na hOstaire, leathchéad bliain ó shoin –
É sin, agus ar lean é –
Ní náire feacadh i láthair Dé –
Ach sibhse, na meacain scoiltithe,
Bhur gccoilgsheasamh ar bhur “gcuaillí arda”,
Nil agaibh teicheadh ón aithis:
Ársa na mBeann crapadh go hisle glún,
Beatha na n-éag insa láib,
Ar a chosa deiridh don mbrútach!’

**English translation**

The old Jew on all fours,
A load of snow on his shoulders,
Ages of having been chosen in his features –
‘In this way’, said the metal figure,
‘My people scrubbed the paving stones of the street
In Austria’s Wien, half a century ago –
That and what followed it –
No shame in bowing down in God’s presence…
But you, the mandrakes
Standing bolt-upright on your ‘lofty stilts’,
You’ve no escape from defilement:
The Ancient of the Peaks crushed to the knees,
Living death in the mud,
And the Brute on his hind legs!’

*Translated by David Sowby*
The Holocaust

The Holocaust did not begin with gas chambers and crematoria, it began with whispers, taunts, humiliation, discrimination, confiscation of property, segregation, restrictions, rules and laws. It began with stereotyping, attitudes, bigotry and prejudice.

When Adolf Hitler became leader of the Nazi party in 1921, he stated that his ultimate aim was the removal of the Jews from German society. By the time he became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, he was planning to remove the Jews from Germany by expulsion and evacuation. With the annexation of Austria in 1938 and the subsequent absorption of Czechoslovakia in 1939, Hitler was in control of more territory and more Jews. The invasion of Poland in 1939, which heralded the beginning of World War II, brought a further three million Jews under German control. The persecution of the Jews went through several stages. The words ‘expulsion’ and ‘evacuation’ were soon understood to mean murder.

It is estimated that 9.6 million Jews lived in what became Nazi occupied Europe. By the end of the war in 1945, only 3.2 million Jews had survived the Holocaust. There were also millions of other victims of Nazi atrocities.

What I found most shocking was that the Nazi German leaders were normal people!

Telford Taylor, one of the chief prosecutors at the first trial in Nuremberg

Nazi Persecution of the Jews

HUMILIATION
IDENTIFICATION
SEGREGATION
CONCENTRATION
MURDER

Auschwitz-Birkenau has come to symbolise the process that was to implement the destruction of the Jews of Europe. The camp was planned and constructed like any other site. Its blueprints were drawn by professional engineers and draftsmen. The trains that delivered the victims to their deaths were driven by regular drivers, the gas used in the Nazi’s murderous crimes was essentially a disinfectant. None of the site’s overt elements, its objects and procedures, gave any indication that they were instruments used to commit one of the greatest crimes against humanity – the genocide of the Jewish people, together with the torture and murder of many other innocents.

From the exhibition Architecture of Murder: The Auschwitz-Birkenau blueprints. Yad Vashem Archives Collection
It is true that not all of the victims were Jews...

Nazi Persecution of Political Opponents

The Nazis persecuted hundreds of thousands of political dissidents and opponents – some for what they did, some for what they refused to do, and some for what they were. In the early 1920s, the Nazis began disrupting meetings of Liberal Democrats, Socialists, Communists, and Trade Unionists. The torching of the Reichstag national parliament building in 1933 gave the Nazis a pretext for suppressing the Communist Party, and later the Social Democratic Party, with brutal violence.

The Nazis abolished trade unions and co-operatives, confiscated their assets, and prohibited strikes. Political dissidents and political opponents were among the first to be arrested. In 1933, the Nazis established the first concentration camp, Dachau, as a detention centre for political prisoners arrested after the Reichstag fire.

Opponents of Hitler were murdered in the Night of the Long Knives in 1934. Hundreds of thousands of political dissidents were imprisoned in the concentration camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe during the war. They were identified by a red triangle which they wore on their camp uniforms.

Nazi Persecution of People with Disabilities

In July 1933 the Nazis announced the ‘sterilisation law’, the ‘Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily-Diagnosed Offspring’. By the start of the war, some 300,000 people with disabilities had been sterilized with a further 100,000 by 1945, one percent of the German population aged between 14 and 50. On the basis of these figures, with the drift from sterilisation to euthanasia and the gradual targeting of ethnic groups, medicine became part of the genocidal policies of extermination.

The Nazis considered people with intellectual and physical disabilities as ‘life unworthy of life’. School textbooks contained examples of maths problems calculating the costs of care for people with disabilities compared to the costs of caring for a healthy person. People with disabilities were portrayed as a ‘burden on the state’ or ‘useless eaters’. The Nazis decided that the elimination of such people from society would strengthen and purify the German race.

On 1 September 1939 Hitler officially established the T-4 Euthanasia Programme (named after the address of its headquarters at Tiergartenstrasse 4). The secret Reich Committee for the Scientific Registering of Serious Hereditary and Congenital Illnesses ordered the compulsory registration of ‘malformed’ newborn children: those suffering from intellectual or physical disabilities.

Doctors and midwives were paid two Reichsmarks for each case they reported to their superiors. It is estimated that the Nazis murdered more than 200,000 people with disabilities in the ‘voluntary euthanasia programme’. Many of the doctors involved spoke with pride of their work even after the war, maintaining that they had been contributing to human progress.

Very soon it was not only children with disabilities who were being murdered, but adults too. Thousands of intellectually disabled adults and psychiatric patients were murdered in gas vans in killing centres at Bernberg, Hadamar, Hartheim and Sonnenstein. Public outcry, led by Bishop Clemens von Galen, caused the official cessation of the T-4 Euthanasia Programme in August 1941, but it continued clandestinely until 1945.

The machinery of mass murder developed in the course of the T-4 Euthanasia Programme had operated with grim efficiency and was now ready to be applied to others, on a far larger scale.
Nazi Persecution of Poles

Poland held lands vital to Germany. It is estimated that three million Poles were murdered by the Nazis who viewed men, women and children of Polish derivation and language as ‘sub-humans’. Hitler ordered that all members of the Polish intelligentsia were to be killed, its academically educated and professional classes annihilated, and its population reduced to a state where their lives were worthless. Poland was to be destroyed. Tens of thousands of political and church leaders, intellectuals, professionals, entrepreneurs, landowners and other Poles were targeted. They were either murdered or sent to concentration camps. Polish universities, scientific laboratories, schools, museums, and libraries were destroyed. Polish children did not progress beyond elementary school and thousands were forcibly taken to Germany to be reared as Germans. The expropriation of Polish and Jewish property was explicitly ordered from Berlin, as was the ‘Germanisation’ of the incorporated territories and the transfers of population. The invading German armies undertook their work with zeal and brutality.

A Polish prisoner (marked with an identifying patch bearing a ‘P’ for Pole), Julian Noga, at the Flossenbürg concentration camp, Germany, between August 1942 and April 1945. USHMM

Nazi Persecution of Gypsies

The Nazi genocide of the Gypsies, who today are referred to as Roma and Sinti, is known in the Romany language as the Pharrajimos (the devouring). No exact figures are available, but it is estimated that the Nazis and their collaborators killed between 250,000 and 500,000 Roma and Sinti men, women and children across German-occupied Europe. They were gassed, starved or used as human guinea-pigs. At least another half million were displaced and dispossessed, their identity documents destroyed.

On 2 September 1939, a Nazi conference on racial policy discussed the removal of 30,000 German and Austrian Gypsies to occupied Poland. The ‘resettlement in the east’, followed by mass murder, closely resembled the systematic deportations and killings of the Jews. In the summer of 1942, German and Polish Gypsies imprisoned in the Warsaw ghetto were deported to Treblinka where they were gassed. German Gypsies were also deported to ghettos in Bialystock, Krakow and Radom.

250 Romany children were murdered in Buchenwald in January 1940 where they they were used to test the efficacy of the Zyklon B crystals, later used in the gas chambers. In December 1941 Himmler ordered all Romanies remaining in Europe to be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau for extermination. They were brought there from German-occupied territories that included Moravia and Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway. 23,000 perished.

After the war, thousands of Gypsies remained in Transnistria, Baragan and other Displaced Persons camps. Their situation was compounded by the fact that they were unable to provide formal proof of their identities, nationalities or ancestry.

In 2004, an annual wreath-laying ceremony was inaugurated in Auschwitz-Birkenau at the site of the Gypsy camp 60 years after the gassing of the final 2,900 Gypsies who were incarcerated there.
Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals

Male homosexuality was illegal, under a definition which had already been considerably expanded before the war. Heinrich Himmler and the Reich Ministry of Justice announced the death penalty for some homosexuals, and in July 1943, Ernst Kaltenbrunner of the SS succeeded in having an edict passed for the forced castration of homosexuals.

The Nazis arrested thousands of gay men, who were sent to prison or concentration camps. They were forced to wear pink triangles on their camp uniforms, and lesbians were forced to wear black triangles. In the concentration camps, homosexuals were subjected to harder work, less food, and stricter supervision than other inmates. Thousands were put to death.

Discrimination against homosexuals continued after the war, and gay concentration camp survivors were not acknowledged as victims of Nazi persecution. Some even had to serve out the terms of their original prison sentences, as the laws against homosexuals remained on the West German statute books until 1969.

Nazi Persecution of Black and Ethnic Minorities

Fifty years before the Holocaust, Germans were carrying out medical experiments on black people. Between 1894 and 1904 German settlers in the colony of German South Africa (part of present-day Namibia) systematically lynched members of the Herero tribe, raped their women and stole their cattle. When the Herero rebelled they were killed or incarcerated in concentration camps. Their numbers were reduced from 80,000 to 15,000. In the early years of the 20th century, the German geneticist Eugen Fischer published his scientific race theories in a book called The Principles of Human Heredity and Race Hygiene, which impressed and influenced Hitler and, ultimately, Josef Mengele.

After the First World War, France occupied the German Rhineland and deployed black African colonial soldiers as the occupying force. The result was hundreds of mixed-race children born to German women, who became targets of Hitler.

In order to preserve the “purity of the Aryan population”, the Nazis established Commission Number 3, which secretly organised the forced sterilisation of hundreds of children of African ancestry. By the outbreak of the Second World War, thousands had fled and those who remained were annihilated.

Nazi Persecution of Christians and of Jehovah’s Witnesses

Thousands of Jehovah’s Witnesses were murdered by the Nazis for their refusal to salute Hitler as ‘Saviour’ or to serve in the German armed forces. Thousands of Catholics, Protestants, and others of Christian affiliation were persecuted and murdered. There were also hundreds of Christians, Quakers and others who actively opposed the Nazi regime, many of whom risked their lives to save Jews.
Badges of Hate

Jews who were in concentration camps often wore yellow triangles like this one marked with a ‘U’ indicating that the prisoner who wore it was from Hungary.

This patch identified a Polish person living under Nazi control.

Black triangles were worn by those classified as ‘antisocial’ including Gypsies, lesbians and prostitutes.

Political prisoners wore red triangles.

How could this have happened?

One of the most vocal political opponents of the Nazis was Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller. He spent more than eight years in various concentration camps for his anti-Nazi activities. After the war, he persuaded the German Protestant churches to formally accept guilt for their complicity in the suffering of Jews and political dissidents during Hitler’s tyranny. His famous response to a student’s question: How could this have happened? serves as a constant reminder about racism:

First they came for the Communists,
But I was not a Communist, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Socialists and Trade Unionists,
But I was not a Socialist or Trade Unionist, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Jews,
But I was not a Jew, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for me,
But by then there was no one left to speak out for me.
...But all the Jews were victims

Europe - The number of Jews annihilated by the Nazis in each European country

The white figures on black relate to the approximate number of Jews who perished in each European country between September 1939 and May 1945. The total of just over 5,750,000 does not include thousands of infants murdered by the Nazis in late 1941, before their births could be recorded. Thousands of people from the remoter villages in Poland were added to the deportation trains which left larger localities, without any record of their existence or of their fate.
The Wannsee Conference

The Wannsee Conference took place on 20 January 1942 at a secluded lakeside villa on the shore of Lake Wannsee, a few miles from Berlin. Fifteen senior Nazi and German officials had been summoned by SS General Reinhard Heydrich, the chief of the Reich Security Main Office and head of the German secret police, who told them he had just been appointed to arrange for the Final Solution of the European Jewish Question – the total elimination of the Jews of Europe.

The delegates met to co-ordinate their actions so that their task would be carried out more efficiently, with a view to complete success – the murder of all the Jews in Europe. Eichmann presented delegates with a list of the number of Jews living in each European country, whom the Nazis intended to annihilate. Ireland appears on the list with a total of 4,000 Jews.

At the Wannsee Conference, the participants debated at length who was Jewish according to ‘bloodline’ considerations. The delegates discussed the evacuation and the resettlement of the Jews and concluded that a more efficient method of their disposal was necessary, one that would eliminate as much residue as possible and spare those operating the system from negative psychological trauma.

The Final Solution had been decided upon prior to the conference; Heydrich was looking for endorsement to carry out the implementation of the Final Solution – murder by poison gas.

It took less than two hours for those present to unanimously give Heydrich their support to implement the Führer’s plans.

Anxious to visit a site of Jewish life – Jews as subject, not object – I headed for the Oranienburger Strasse Synagogue. Dedicated in 1866 at a ceremony attended by the Prussian prime minister, Mismar, it was one of the first synagogues German authorities allowed to be built on a prestigious street rather than on a back alley. A magnificent Moorish structure with a red-striped-yellow-brick-and-brown-stone façade and a gleaming bulbous dome 160 feet above the street topped by a Jewish star, its sanctuary had accommodated over three thousand people. For Berlin Jews, the building symbolized their freedom to aspire to full participation in the secular world. Set ablaze in November 1938 on Kristallnacht, when hundreds of German synagogues were destroyed.

After years of neglect, the façade and expansive vestibule had recently been repaired. An open gravel field spread out where the sanctuary once stood. Pillars marked its precise boundaries. At the far end of this field, in a style reminiscent of an archaeological site, the bits and pieces of the pulpit and the Holy Ark, which had been excavated from the rubble, had been placed in their original position. Some seemed eerily suspended in air. Standing at what once was the entrance to this magnificent sanctuary and looking out at this contemporary void, I thought of the cognac-drinking bureaucrats at Wannsee. The absence, not just of the sanctuary, but of the community whose destruction they had coordinated, was palpable.

Deborah Lipstadt
Murder

T-4 Euthanasia Programme

The T-4 Euthanasia programme was named after the headquarters of the operation at Tiergartenstrasse 4, Berlin. Adolf Hitler initiated this programme in 1939 to kill elderly people, the terminally ill and people with disabilities. The Nazis referred to the programme’s victims as ‘burdensome lives’ and ‘useless eaters’; they considered them ‘unworthy of life’. Although it was officially discontinued in 1941, killings continued covertly until the military defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. It is estimated that the number of people with disabilities killed in this programme, including the covert phase, exceeded 200,000.

Concentration Camps

The Nazis established more than one thousand concentration camps in Germany and its occupied territories. The Nazis imprisoned Jews, Gypsies, POWs, political and religious opponents, homosexuals and others considered ‘enemies of the state’. A great number of concentration camps also served as forced labour camps, where the prisoners were subjected to work under extreme brutality and harsh conditions. The very poor living conditions, subsistence levels of food, lack of insulation from the cold, and lack of sanitation, coupled with maltreatment, caused prisoners to die within a couple of months of arrival. Shooting and hanging of prisoners were common.

Killing sites/Einsatzgruppen

On 21 June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa). Special killing squads called Einsatzgruppen followed the German army into Eastern Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and other eastern territories occupied by the Nazis where they operated hundreds of killing sites in these regions. Einsatzgruppen comprised German police, local collaborators, SS units, as well as officers and soldiers of the German army. They murdered more than 1.5 million Jews in the forests, fields and cemeteries or herded them into ravines or pits which the victims had to dig themselves before they were shot. Einsatzgruppen killed mostly Jews but also murdered Gypsies, communists and others. This “slow and cumbersome” method of eradicating the Jews as well as the face-to-face killing which was having a psychological effect on some of the killers, prompted the Nazis to find a more efficient solution to the elimination of the Jewish people – death by poison gas.

Einsatzgruppen continued to operate in rural areas in parallel to the extermination taking place in the death camps.
Death Camps

There were six death camps, all in Nazi-occupied Poland, established specifically to murder people (mainly Jews) by poison gas. Four of the death camps were established specifically for this purpose and were dismantled on completion of their function: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. Revolts took place in Sobibor and Treblinka. Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau were originally established as POW camps, slave labour and concentration camps, and ultimately they also became extermination camps. They were both liberated by the Soviet Army towards the end of the war: Majdanek in July 1944 and Auschwitz-Birkenau in January 1945.

Slave Labour

A great number of the concentration camps were also slave labour camps. Inmates who were capable of work were of use to the Reich. If they could withstand the harsh conditions, maltreatment, beatings, inadequate clothing and meagre rations, they had a slightly better chance of survival. It is scarcely known even today that hundreds of special forced labour camps also existed for German, Austrian and Polish Jews, entirely independently of the SS administered concentration camp system. For the Jewish slave labourers, work was not a way of escaping death; rather, it constituted an alternative way to die. The “annihilation through labour” system met the tasks set by the Nazi planners just as well as gassing – with the additional “advantage” that the Reich made something from its victims… Jewish slave labour became a synonym for a longer death.

Death Marches

As the Allies were closing in, the Nazis wanted to remove all traces of their murderous deeds in the concentration and the death camps. They forced prisoners out of the camps on foot to march back towards Germany. These were known as Death Marches. Thousands of prisoners, already weakened by malnutrition, hard labour and ill treatment, perished on these marches.

On 18 January 1945, some 3,000 prisoners dressed in flimsy striped clothing were force-marched in heavy snow out of Birkenau in Poland. The marchers alleviated their thirst by eating snow; they slept out in the open. After covering 59 kilometres on foot, they were placed aboard open freight cars. Many froze to death on the way. When the train stopped, the prisoners continued on foot. Several hundred men escaped into the forest; many were shot. During the ten days of the march, the prisoners received food only four times. After a further trek of 368 kilometres, those still alive reached Gross Rosen concentration camp in Germany. On the last day of the war, the few survivors were liberated by the Red Army. They had covered a total of 498 kilometres on foot.
Camp Orchestras

At the concentration and extermination camps, the Nazis created orchestras of prisoner-musicians. These musical ensembles played concerts for the Nazi and SS officers. But most of the time, the orchestras were forced to play classical music while their co-prisoners were marched out each morning and back each evening after ten or twelve hours of gruelling slave labour. Most sadistic of all was the imperative for the orchestras to play as fellow prisoners were herded to the gas chambers or marched to the gallows.

Gena Turel was born in Krakow in 1923. She survived Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen. She recalls her arrival at Auschwitz:

“The first sight that greeted us on our arrival at Auschwitz was a small group of women fiddlers, I remember thinking it was like a madhouse! At Auschwitz, every last remnant of respect and dignity was squeezed out of us. In our loose, striped, insect-ridden clothing and with our hair cropped or shaved, we felt completely dehumanised”

Glimpses

After a tough day selecting who’d live or die, For light relief Mengele had the camp cellist Anita Lasker play him Schumann’s Traumerei.

But in concerts under Mahler’s niece’s baton Hints of perfection outside a chimney’s shadow. Behind all hopelessness a kind of life went on.

 Depths of survival. Klezmer or jazz or céili, A story squeezes at the edge clamours of music; Out of darkest histories, profoundest gaiety.

A feast of rich food and well-aged wine. Visions beyond loosening back into a world Too deep and copious for black suns to shine.

Imagined surprises, surprises beyond our ken. Dream and reality feeding circuitries of hope; A promise to remember, a promise of never again.

Micheal O’Siadhail

Despite the inhuman conditions and the fight for survival, a focused effort was made in the ghettos to sanctify life and respond to the public’s needs. Religious practices and Jewish cultural traditions were maintained (albeit clandestinely in a lot of cases), and even drama and musical concerts were performed regularly.

Theatre or concerts are often considered forms of “passive” resistance, as were religious activities. For some prisoners, performing theatre was a personal restorative or mental escape. For others, it was a calculated means to extra rations or better housing.

Rabbi Arie Ludwig Zuckerman wrote this Haggada text by hand and from memory in preparation for Passover in 1941 at the Gurs internment camp in France. The Camp Rabbinate made copies, added the texts of the songs, and the holiday was celebrated despite the harsh conditions in the camp.

Yad Vashem Archive
The Terezin concentration camp outside Prague (in the old fortress of Theresienstadt) was created to cover up the Nazi genocide of the Jews. A high proportion of artists and intellectuals was incarcerated in Terezin, and culture flourished. A Red Cross inspection in 1944 found Terezin to be a “model ghetto”. However, what the Red Cross inspectors did not see was the starvation, disease and the constant dread of transports to the death camps of the east. Those who were brought to Terezin in crowded cattle cars after days of cruelty, humiliation and beatings, wanted to believe that here they would be safe. All of them were deceived; the same fate awaited them; every one of the Terezin inmates was condemned in advance to die. Between 1942 and 1944, 140,000 Jews passed through Terezin, 123,440 perished., Fifteen thousand were children of whom fewer than 100 survived.

For a time, the children played, studied, drew pictures and wrote poems. Their poems and drawings allow us to see through children’s eyes what no child should ever have to see. But they were children. They also drew and wrote about gardens and butterflies, warm colourful homes, happier times, feeding their kittens. In their art, we see their courage, their optimism, their hopes and their fears. They lived, locked within the walls and courtyards of Theresienstadt. It became their world, a world of colour, shadow, hunger and hope.

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun’s tears would sing against a white stone…

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly ‘way up high’.
It went away I’m sure because it wished to go kiss the world good-by.

For seven weeks I’ve lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto.
But I have found what I love here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut branches in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don’t live in here, in the ghetto.

Pavel Friedmann, aged 17, June 1942, Theresienstadt

This poem was found amongst a cache of children’s artwork at the end of the war that had been hidden by the artist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis who was a prisoner in Theresienstadt. It was subsequently deposited in the Jewish Museum, Prague.

Pavel was eventually deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, where he died on 29 September 1944.

Fall

Fall is here.
The leaves turn yellow on the trees,
the campfire dies out.
My thoughts are far from here,
somewhere far,
where integrity lives.
It lives in my friend.
Now I think of her.
Memories gather ‘round me
Like falling leaves.

A. Lindtova

I’d like to go alone
I’d like to go away alone
Where there are other, nicer people,
Somewhere into the far unknown,
There, where no one kills another.
Maybe more of us,
A thousand strong,
Will reach this goal
Before too long.

Alena Synkova

Petr Ginz

Petr Ginz was a 14-year-old Jewish boy from Prague who was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto in 1942. He was a very bright and talented young man and the driving force behind Vedem (we lead), the weekly newspaper produced by the boys in his barracks. Written by hand and read out loud every Friday evening, the newspaper consisted of essays, poems and short stories as well as a weekly column, Strolls Through Theresienstadt in which Ginz and his friends reported on various parts of the ghetto from the bakery to the morgue. On 28 September 1944 Petr Ginz was put on a train to Auschwitz and sent to his death in a gas chamber immediately upon his arrival. He was 16 years old.
More than 1,200 ghettos were established by the Germans in Central and Eastern Europe. The purpose of establishing the ghettos was to separate the Jews from the rest of the population so that they could be easily controlled and easily accessed. The Nazis forced thousands of Jews to live in cramped areas that could not possibly accommodate the huge numbers being forced into them, often without either running water or a connection to the sewage system. As a result, starvation and disease were rampant, wreaking a huge death toll. It is estimated that between one and one and a half million Jews died in the ghettos. The ghettos represented places of degradation, hardship and unimaginable suffering, where the Nazis subjected the inhabitants to brutality, shootings, beatings and hangings.

Although there are several heroic stories of resistance, most of the ghetto populations were deported directly to the death camps, and just a few to the forced labour or concentration camps.

Judenraete

Daily life in the ghettos was administered by Nazi-appointed Jewish councils called Judenraete who had to face impossible choices and dilemmas that included organising the deportations of Jews to the killing centres. The Germans forced Jews residing in ghettos to wear labels or badges, and they exploited the ghetto inhabitants for slave labour; as long as they were of use to the Reich, they lived; if they were not useful, they died.

During the annihilation of the Cracow Ghetto, individuals and entire families perished, whole dynasties of rabbis perished - all gone. Respected families whose ancestors settled in Cracow hundreds of years ago and whose names were recorded in the ancient chronicles of the old city were wiped away. With their demise, the genealogy ended and the traditions vanished. While being good Jews, they were also Polish patriots.

Tadeusz Pankiewicz

Vilna

Jews have played a part in the history of Lithuania since the 14th century, lured to the region by tolerant Lithuanian Dukes seeking to make advancements in trade and culture. Jews first arrived as merchants, artisans, and traders, but soon evolved into an integral component of Lithuania’s national identity. The first documents mentioning Jews in Vilnius date back as early as 1567.

The Jewish quarter was formed in the Old Town and according to the 1784 census there were around 5,000 Jews in Vilnius at that time and just over a hundred years later in 1897, the census records 64,000 Jews living in Vilna, most of whom spoke Yiddish. They represented almost half of the town’s population.

Waves of antisemitism swept through Lithuania from 1881 onwards. Despite this, on the eve of the Shoah the Jewish community of Vilna was the spiritual centre of Eastern European Jewry, the centre of enlightenment and Jewish political life, of Jewish creativity and the experience of daily Jewish life. It was a community bursting with cultural and religious life, movements and parties, educational institutions, libraries and theatres; a community of rabbis and gifted Talmudic scholars, intellectuals, poets, authors, artists, craftspeople and educators. In the Jewish world it was known as “The Jerusalem of Lithuania” – a spiritual centre of the first order. The Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO), dedicated to the preservation of Yiddish culture, flourished in Vilna. The community of Vilna which had thrived and blossomed for hundreds of years was decimated during the Holocaust.

On 22 June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet territories and entered Vilna on 24th of the month. There were 57,000 Jews living there at the time, representing approximately 30% of the population. The Germans conquered Vilna and established a joint administration with the Lithuanians who collaborated with the German authorities in the harassment and murder of Jews.

The Military Administration required Jews to wear yellow badges and later, a white arm band with a yellow Star of David with the letter J (Jude) in the centre. Jewish movement was restricted, property was confiscated and Jews were drafted for forced labour. A Judenrat, or Jewish council, was established by the Germans. The German administration forbade the Jews from using public transportation or entering public areas in the city, imposed curfews, rationed food, confiscated their telephones and seized their
properties. Jews were dismissed from employment and in grocery stores, special “Jewish queues” were established, from which most left empty handed.

On the 2 July 1941, the mass murder of the Jews of Vilna began. Unit 9, in partnership with Lithuanians, began shooting Jews into pits in Ponary, a holiday destination before the war, 10 km from Vilna. 5,000 were murdered in this first action. The Jews were taken from the streets, taken to the Lukiski prison and from there transported to Ponary. From July to the end of December 1941, more than 15,000 Vilna Jews were murdered.

Immediately after the initial murder, the Nazis established two ghettos, to which the Jewish residents of Vilna were exiled. The residents of the ghettos were soon divided up into categories: the “productive” population – craftsmen and workers with permits – gathered in Ghetto No. 1; the remainder in Ghetto No.2. Two Jewish councils – Judenraete – were established. Ghetto No. 2 was liquidated on 21 October 1941. At the beginning of 1942, the head of the Jewish Police in Ghetto No. 1, Jacob Gens, became the head of the Judenrat.

Very soon after the establishment of the ghetto, the educational system was reinstated and included two kindergartens, three elementary schools, a high school and classes on assorted subjects that were held in Yiddish and later, also in Hebrew. The Judenrat’s culture department ran a very popular public library as well as theatrical and musical productions.

In the ghetto, individuals and groups took the initiative in organising artistic performances and concerts even before the Judenrat established a department for dealing with these areas. The Judenrat and the police were convinced that the theatre would raise people’s spirits and that the proceeds from the concerts would be directed towards social welfare. Jacob Gens used the theatre stage to deliver his speeches and present his policies. He believed that the theatre would bring comfort to the residents, reducing their suffering by allowing them to “escape” to a different world.

Before the first concert, Josef Glazman apologised for holding a performance in the ghetto and eulogised the victims. Those who initially opposed the theatre and orchestra came to accept their existence. The concerts, performances and lectures became an important social occurrence in a starving ghetto which was also mourning its dead. Music institutions and music schools were also set up in the ghetto. A music school for 100 students was established. The conductor Yakov Gerstein re-established his students’ choir and the conductor Wolf Durmashkin established an orchestra which held 35 concerts. Hermann Kruk, who was one of the first to oppose performances in the ghetto, eventually recognised their value.

And even so, life is stronger than everything. Life is once again pulsating in the Vilna Ghetto. In the shadow of Ponary life is happening and there is hope for a better morning. The concerts that were initially boycotted are accepted by the public. The halls are full. Literary evenings are full and the great hall cannot hold everyone who comes.

Hermann Kruk, A Diary in the Vilna Ghetto

An association of authors and artists was established in the ghetto which encouraged creativity and spread art and culture. The association organised fortnightly literary and artistic gatherings

“over a cup of tea” in which lectures were given and artistic performances were presented including recitals and singing in Yiddish and Hebrew.

Cultural activities that centered on a Zionist ideology also took place in the ghetto, under the auspices of the “Brit Ivrit” (Hebrew Union). A Hebrew choir was established, and another, smaller choir performed pioneering songs, biblical texts, Chassidic melodies. A Yiddish choir performed Yiddish songs, mostly folk tunes. Another choir sang liturgical music and Brit Ivrit also ran a Hebrew theatre.

On the 26th of April 1942 the ghetto theatre opened in the “Small City Hall” with a production of “Shlomo Molcho” in the presence of the Judenrat, police, writers, artists and the general public. Performances and lectures were held on Sunday mornings for workers who returned late at night. There was also a puppet theatre. In 1942 there were 120 performances before 38,000 spectators.

Although the founding of the ghetto’s theatre was controversial, it did play an important role in raising the spirit of the ghetto residents. The theatre put on four performances from the dramatic Yiddish repertoire. After the theatre was established, a writers’ and artists’ union was set up to promote art and culture. The ghetto musicians set up their own association in February 1942, with a membership of fifty. These organisations promoted art competitions and cultural events and provided assistance for struggling artists. The theatre was active until the liquidation of the ghetto in September 1943. The Jewish community of Vilna, which endured the traumas of mass murder and destruction, had turned to its richest and most dependable wellspring, culture, to build a Jewish life of meaning and hope.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 of the original 57,000 Jewish inhabitants of Vilnius survived, either in hiding, with the partisans, or in camps in Germany and Estonia, a mortality rate of approximately 95% - almost exactly corresponding with that of the Jewish population of Lithuania as a whole.
This article has been adapted from the oration which was almost certainly written by Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder on the dedication of his memorial to the Jews of his community in Kolin, where he had been the rabbi before and after the Holocaust. It describes the life of the Jews in a small town, which is probably typical of what happened in many small towns in Bohemia and Moravia once the Germans took over in March 1939. Although there are many references to Kolin, they probably represent examples of what happened to Jews in communities across the country. The translation is by Ladislav Hornan.

During the Occupation, Kolin, being a district centre, became an important city because it was the residence of a powerful regional commander, cruel Gestapo and police. It was therefore a feared place from which emanated ever new regulations, making the citizens’ lives more burdensome, where harsh interrogations took place, high fines and penalties were levied, and from where numerous people were sent to work in the hated Reich. Kolin was therefore a town which people did not like to hear about or travel to, and from which they were happy to leave.

The same fate was shared by the Jewish religious community of Kolin, which very quickly became the centre for all the sixteen other Jewish religious communities of the surrounding district under the rule of the Kolin Regional Command (Oberlandrat). Until then these other communities were completely independent. The Kolin community had to make the work easier for the Oberlandrat and Gestapo and was obliged to advise the sister communities of all the regulations being issued by the Oberlandrat and the Central Office for Jewish Affairs in Prague by which increasingly greater limitations were placed on the lives of the Jews.

For example, Jews were not allowed to leave the house without the yellow star, be on the street after 8.00 p.m., or visit bars, cafes, theatres, cinemas, exhibitions, lectures, auctions, stock exchanges, swimming pools, parks and woods. Jews could not send their children to schools for the general public but were not allowed to organise private schools. They were not allowed to own a radio or listen to broadcasts, buy and read newspapers or own a telephone. They could only travel, in the first carriage (where the engine was) of trains and trams, could not leave their district without an official permit, were not allowed to own bonds, shares, gold and silver jewellery and, if they did, all had to be handed over by a certain date. Jews had to declare their money deposits and were allowed to withdraw only modest sums, could not carry on farming, medical practice, legal practice, commercial or industrial business, publish any article in the press or publish books. Jews could be neither official nor private clerks, could not live in comfortable apartments and especially villas, could not own fur coats, woollen sweaters, skis and ski equipment, driving licences, vehicles or musical instruments. They could not be accepted as patients (even if seriously ill) in public hospitals or private sanatoria. They could not shop in the market but only in certain shops during the prescribed hour, could not receive full food rations and no smoking materials, could not go to the barbers, own dogs or pigeons. As these rules were issued gradually, the Jewish community of Kolin always had a heavy administrative burden. Especially unpleasant was the community’s contact with the Gestapo, whose orders had to be obeyed strictly without objection.

It was difficult for Jews to breathe in these circumstances, but they managed to withstand all this with calm as long as they were allowed to live in private apartments, sleep in their own beds and eat their own food. But even this was not afforded to them for long.

In the middle of April 1942, all Jews, with the exception of babies and the sick with doctor’s certificates, from the whole Oberlandrat were called to Kolin, being the district centre, for registration which took place in the High School and took a whole week. The official from the Prague Central Office of Jewish Affairs, who was dealing with the registration, lived in the school where he felt more secure than in an hotel, but the Jews had to furnish his room with beautiful furniture, refined carpets, and pictures. The registration was farcical because this official did not even look at the Jews who were approaching him, but only ticked their names off whilst he was bullying those who did not follow his procedure. Despite this, it was a very serious event as it signalled something much worse – deportation.
This was carried out with much cruelty and lack of consideration in the first half of June 1942. The spacious building of the High School was chosen as the collection point for these human outcasts, because it was situated close to a suburban railway station that was used by the Jews in the mornings. When the Jews entered the school building, they were under the control of the police. There they had to surrender the keys to their apartments, cash, the rest of their silver, watches, and the men had their hair and beards cut.

Many of them were harshly interrogated and beaten without mercy when they would not reveal where they had hidden their money. These interrogations unfortunately took place as a result of information given by our false friends.

The Germans consigned various transports from these district centres to Terezin. Not even seriously ill people, with the exception of two or three, were taken out of the transport. But Jews from mixed marriages, several leaders of the community and individuals whose expertise was recognised as economically important were removed from the transport. But they were all taken later.

In Kutna Hora several women remained, who were declared seriously ill by a brave doctor. They all recovered, completely on the 9th of May 1945, when they were liberated by the Red Army.

As an example, the total number of Jews transported from Kolin was 2,202, of whom 168 died in Terezin. 1,944 were sent to the East, of whom about 20 returned. 88 people survived Kolin was 2,202, of whom 168 died in Terezin. 1,944 were sent to the East, of whom about 20 returned. 88 people survived.

The participants in most of the transports did not stay in Terezin for long. 250 from Kolin never even saw Terezin the Germans sent one thousand Jews to the East from Terezin on 13 June 1942, on the day the third transport arrived at Bohusovice. The 250 joined the other train with Jews from many other towns, which was already at the station, and eventually they travelled on, although we do not know to where, and they were most probably murdered straight after arrival. We have no details, only that not one returned.

In this way, the cruel Germans annihilated almost all the Jews in the Oberlandrat, confiscated their possessions and desecrated their synagogues.

Already in November 1941 the Germans sent the most influential families together with community officials to Lodz and an unknown fate via Prague transports. Some Jews chose to die voluntarily to escape the evacuation. Many Jews managed to join villages and relatives and old people’s homes in Prague. Eventually, the Germans sent to Terezin the Jews that worked in the community, children of Jewish faith from mixed marriages who had reached the age of 14, and young men who were on forced labour in Lipa.

Amongst the town’s victims of racism were one teacher, one professor, one veterinary surgeon, eight doctors, ten doctors of law, four engineers, two Ph.D.’s, two active officers, one policeman, two industrialists, four farmers, four businessmen, six skilled workers, thirty-nine economists, several shopkeepers, clerks, pensioners and many widows. They were in all, honourable people, industrious, well thought of, having warmly participated in Czech public life, and the acts of the Germans on these people were a great injustice. They died as martyrs. How can we preserve their names for future generations and also the Jewish history of their town and community?

In February 1945 the Jewish partners from mixed marriages were deported. As an example, the total number of Kolin victims amounted to 480 people.

The Germans were murdering all people of Jewish origin. We will pay our respects to all the martyrs from all the towns and villages with their Jewish communities, and we ask all those who knew these unfortunates and all who care about what happened to them to condemn this injustice which was committed on them, to join in making sure that somewhere somebody cares enough to honour and remember them as they deserve to be remembered - as people who matter to someone.

**Viktor goes down the unaccustomed steps to the courtyard, passes the statue of Apollo, avoids the looks of the new officials, and the looks of his old tenants, out of the gateway, past the SA guard on duty, onto the Ring. And where can he go?**

*He cannot go to his café, to his office, to his club, to his cousins. He has no café, no office, no club, no cousins. He cannot sit on a public bench any more: the benches in the park outside the Votivkirche have Juden verboten stencilled on them. He cannot go into the Sacher, he cannot go into the Café Griensteidl, he cannot go into the Central, or go to the Prater, or to his bookshop, cannot go to the barber, cannot walk through the park. He cannot go on a tram: Jews and those who look Jewish have been thrown off. He cannot go to the cinema. And he cannot go to the Opera. Even if he could, he would not hear music written by Jews, played by Jews or sung by Jews. No Mahler, and no Mendelssohn. Opera has been Aryanised. Here are SA men stationed at the end of the tram line at Neuwaldegg to prevent Jews strolling in the Vienna Woods.*

*The Hare with Amber Eyes, A Hidden Inheritance by Edmund de Waal*
Partisans and Resistance

During World War II an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Jews fought bravely as partisans in resistance groups that operated under cover of the dense forests of eastern Europe. From the Nazis’ rise to power in 1933 to the end of the Third Reich in 1945, Jews as well as other victims of Nazism participated in many acts of resistance. Organised armed resistance was the most direct form of opposition to the Nazis in many areas of German-occupied Europe. Many individuals and groups in ghettos and camps also resisted by acts of rescue, aid and spiritual resistance.

As the victims of Nazi genocide, and an isolated minority among occupied populations, Jews were in a distinctly weak situation. By the end of 1942 more than four million Jews had already been killed by mass shootings and gassings, or had died from starvation, exhaustion, and disease during their internment in the Nazi ghettos, concentration and forced labour camps.

Liberation

The mass murder that had been taking place on an industrial scale was gradually revealed when Allied forces first entered Nazi-occupied territories. They entered Nazi concentration, forced labour and death camps where they confronted heaps of corpses and dying inmates. The growing awareness that heinous crimes had been committed by the Nazis was recorded by Soviet army newsreel footage of the liberation of Majdanek and Sobibor extermination camps in summer 1944. They entered Auschwitz-Birkenau on 27 January 1945 where they found about 7,000 emaciated prisoners alive who had been too frail to leave when the Nazis forced the majority of the camp prisoners on Death Marches. The liberating army found 836,525 items of women’s clothing, 348,820 items of men’s clothing, 43,525 pairs of shoes and 7.7 tons of human hair. In April and May 1945, the Soviet army liberated Gross-Rosen, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, Sered, Stutthof and Theresienstadt.

American army units liberated the Ohdruf slave labour camp in early April 1945, followed by Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenburg, Mauthausen, and the V2 rocket slave-labour camp at Nordhausen. The Canadian Army liberated Westerbork in Holland, and the British army liberated Bergen-Belsen, followed by Neuengamme and other camps. Describing his first encounter with a Nazi horror camp, General Eisenhower wrote: “I have never felt able to describe my emotional reactions when I first came face to face with indisputable evidence of Nazi brutality and ruthless disregard of every shred of decency. I visited every nook and cranny of the camp because I felt it my duty to be in a position from then on to testify at first hand about these things in case there ever grew up at home the belief or assumption that the stories of Nazi brutality were just propaganda. I urged Washington and London to send instantly to Germany a random group of newspaper editors and representative groups from the national legislatures. I felt that the evidence should be immediately placed before the American and British publics in a fashion that would leave no room for cynical doubt.”

I was lying wrapped in my blanket in the block. Someone else was looking out of the window, and I heard him say in Yiddish, ‘An American soldier.’ I didn’t get up, I didn’t move. I lay there. The feeling cannot be described, you would have to make up a new word. ‘I’ve done it. I’ve made it.’ But then I thought: who has survived?

I, I alone! My father had just died, my sister and my mother were gone. I covered my head and wept.

That was the moment of my liberation.
Righteous Among the Nations

In 1953 the State of Israel established Yad Vashem the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in order to document and record the history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Yad Vashem inaugurated the award Righteous Among the Nations in 1963 to honour non-Jews who saved Jews during the Second World War. Over 23,000 people from 44 different countries have received the award. There are countless others who have never received any recognition, and many more who were killed by the Germans for assisting Jews.

The Righteous come from all levels of society, from different backgrounds, ages, religions and ethnic groups. They are individuals such as simple villagers in occupied countries, families, groups of friends or members of organised efforts such as the Dutch Resistance, the village of Le Chambon sur Lignon in France, or Zegota (the Council for Aid to Jews) in Poland. They include well known efforts, such as that of businessman Oskar Schindler, to assistance by diplomats such as the Swedish consul Raoul Wallenberg in Hungary or the Japanese official Sempo Sugihara in Lithuania, who saved several thousand Jews. Many Jews who survived Nazi rule and occupation in Europe between 1939 and 1945 owe their survival to Righteous Among the Nations.

The Righteous refute the notion that there was no alternative to passive complicity with the enemy. The farmers, priests, nuns and soldiers, believers and non-believers, the old and the young from every background in every land made the impossible possible. Their altruism calls us to understand the different choices that individuals make and to commit to challenging every example of intolerance that we witness. The challenge of our time is not whether to remember but what to remember and how to transmit our memory to our children and our children’s children.

Ernst Leitz II and the Leica Freedom Train

Ernst Leitz II was head of a family-owned firm that designed and manufactured Germany’s famous photographic product, the Leica 35 mm camera.

Leitz Inc was an internationally recognised brand that reflected credit on the newly resurgent Reich. The company produced range-finders and other optical systems for the German military. Also, as the Nazi government desperately needed hard currency from abroad, Leitz’s single biggest market for optical goods was the United States.

During the Nazi era, this Protestant, socially-minded businessman saved his Jewish employees and their families. To help them, Leitz quietly established “the Leica Freedom Train”, a covert means of enabling Jews to leave Germany in the guise of Leitz employees being ‘assigned’ to Leitz sales offices overseas in Britain, Hong Kong and the United States.

Soon, the German ‘employees’ were disembarking from ocean liners, making their way to the Manhattan offices of Leitz Inc. The refugees were paid a stipend until they could find work and many Leitz executives quickly found them jobs in the photographic industry.

Leitz’s activities intensified after the November pogrom, Kristallnacht, in November 1938 and peaked in these months until early 1939, delivering groups of refugees to New York every few weeks.
SURVIVAL OF CZECH TORAH SCROLLS

How was it that the Czech Scrolls were saved?

The Munich Pact was signed on 29 September 1938 when Britain and France agreed to Hitler’s annexation of the German speaking border regions of Czechoslovakia – and the Germans marched in. The Jews from dozens of congregations in the prosperous industrial and commercial towns in the Sudetenland had between 3 and 10 days to flee to the interior, which was still a free and sovereign country. They left behind their synagogues, which were in German hands at the time of the November Pogrom, Kristallnacht on 9 November 1938, when synagogues across the expanded Germany, which now included the Sudetenland, were burned or vandalised and looted. In almost every case the ritual treasures of these synagogues were destroyed or lost.

In the remainder of Czechoslovakia, which included Prague, the synagogues and their swollen congregations were safe for the time being, and there was no general programme of destruction, though a few synagogues were destroyed when the Germans invaded the rest of the country in March 1939. In 1940, the congregations were closed down, but the Jewish community administration was used locally by the Germans to execute their decrees and instructions. Deportation started in 1941 and the mass deportations of the Jews took place throughout 1942 and into January 1943. All that was left in these Czech towns were some half-Jews, Jewish partners from mixed marriages, the empty synagogue buildings and the empty homes of the Jews.

Fearful that the deserted synagogues and community buildings would be at the mercy of looters and plunderers, a group of Jews at the Jewish Museum in occupied Prague submitted a plan to the Nazis to save the Jewish ritual and cultural treasures in the vulnerable buildings by bringing them to the museum in Prague so that they could be catalogued and preserved. Why their Nazi overseers accepted the plan is not known. The result was that the Nazi controlled Prague Jewish Community sent out the orders that implemented the plan and permitted the transport companies to carry Jewish goods. With a few exceptions, the Torah Scrolls, other liturgical treasures in gold and silver and ritual textiles were sent to Prague, along with historic archives and thousands of books.

The inventory of what had become the Central Jewish Museum expanded from under 800 items to over 100,000. A task force of Jewish curators, art collectors, librarians, and other experts, effectively prisoners of the Nazis, set to work under Dr Josef Polak, the former director of the museum in Kosice. They meticulously started to sort, catalogue and identify the items that had come from over one hundred congregations in Bohemia and Moravia. Over forty warehouses were required, as well as deserted synagogues in Prague and elsewhere, to store all the Jewish items. As the task progressed under oppressive and intimidating conditions of fear and uncertainty, some of the Jews who were undertaking this work would suddenly be deported to the Terezin concentration camp and death. Eventually there were very few survivors. Polak did survive until 1945, to disappear in sinister circumstances.

It was originally thought that the accumulation of this vast hoard of Judaica was planned by the Nazis to become their museum to the extinct Jewish race. However, there is no evidence to support this theory.

So it was that, in 1956, the Michle Synagogue, in the suburbs of Prague, became the warehouse for hundreds of Torah Scrolls which had come from the large Prague Jewish community and from the many smaller communities that were scattered across what was left of Bohemia and Moravia, after the Sudetenland had been detached. The Scrolls in the Michle Synagogue did not include Scrolls from Slovakia, which was under a separate administration.

After the defeat of Germany, a free and independent Czechoslovakia emerged, but it was a country largely without Jews. Most of the surviving Jews in Prague and the rest of Bohemia and Moravia were from Slovakia and further east from Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Prague, which had had a Jewish population of 54,000 in 1940, was reduced to under 8,000 by 1947, and many of these would leave.

Over 50 congregations were re-established by survivors, but on 27 February 1948, after less than 3 years of post war freedom,
the Communists staged a coup and took over the government of Czechoslovakia and the country was once again under dictatorship. The revival of Jewish life was stifled. The Prague Jewish Museum came under government control. The Torah Scrolls which ended up in the Michle Synagogue building came under public ownership. The State Jewish Museum put on the exhibition of the collected Judaica.

Eric Estorick, an American art dealer living in London, paid many visits to Prague on business in the early 1960’s. Being a frequent visitor to Prague, he came to the attention of the authorities, and, on a visit in 1963 he expressed some interest in a catalogue of Hebraica. He was approached by officials from Artia, the state corporation responsible for trade in works of art, and asked if he would be interested in buying some Torah Scrolls.

Estorick was taken to the Michle Synagogue were he was faced with wooden racks holding about 1800 Scrolls, in seriously damp conditions. He was asked if he wanted to make an offer. He replied that he knew certain parties in London who might be interested.

On his return to London, he contacted a fellow American, Rabbi Harold Reinhart, of the Westminster Synagogue. One of Reinhart’s congregants, Ralph Yablon, offered to put up the money to buy the Scrolls. First, Chimen Abramsky, who was to become Professor of Hebrew Studies at the University of London, was asked to go to Prague for twelve days in November 1963 to examine the Scrolls and to report on their authenticity and condition, then Estorick should go and negotiate a deal. Two trucks laden with 1,564 Scrolls arrived at the Westminster Synagogue in February and March 1964.

After months of sorting, examining and cataloguing each Scroll, the task of distributing them began, with the aim of getting the Scrolls back into the life of Jewish congregations across the world. The Memorial Scrolls Trust was established to carry out this task.

Michael Heppner, Research Director, Memorial Scrolls Trust, London

Memorial Scroll No.373

Memorial Scroll No. 373 is one of 1,564 Czech scrolls brought to Westminster Synagogue from Prague in 1964. These scrolls were collected in 1942 from congregations across Bohemia and Moravia under a plan to save Jewish treasures from vandalism and plunder of the deserted synagogues. Although the Nazis authorised this Jewish plan, the credit for this act of rescue belongs to a group of visionary Jews in Prague.

Every scroll recovered was sent to the Central Jewish Museum in Prague where it was given a number, labelled and catalogued, creating a record of where it had come from. It was here that the number 1729, painted in red on one of the wooden rollers of the Memorial Scroll, was inscribed. As a result of this careful process, we know that this scroll came from Brandys Kostelec.

Torah scrolls and Hebraica were sent for safe keeping to the Jewish Museum in Prague. It was intended to facilitate the return of the scrolls, and other treasures saved, to their congregations once the Nazi occupation was over and the Jews had returned home. They could not have imagined that the Nazi genocide would result in the death of six million Jews. However, by the end of the war, even the curators at the museum had been sent to their deaths and what survived was the collection of Jewish religious and cultural treasures and the card index that identified where everything had come from.

Scroll No. 373 is from Brandys Kostelec and was entrusted to the Dublin Jewish Progressive Congregation in September 1965. One of the conditions of issuing these scrolls to a congregation is that it must undertake a dedication on one Shabbat every year to the Jews of the community from which the scroll originated so that they would be remembered for posterity.
Jan Kaminski

Jan Kaminski was born in Bilgoraj, Poland, in 1932. When he was 7 years old, he managed to escape a round-up of the Jews and fled, leaving his family behind. He survived the war on his wits, running errands, working on farms and even becoming a mascot of the 21st Artillery Regiment of the Polish army. Jan lost most of his family in the Holocaust.

Tomi Reichental

Tomi Reichental was born in 1935 in Piestany, Slovakia. In 1944 he was captured and deported to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp with his mother, grandmother, brother, aunt and cousin. Tomi was just 9 years old when the camp was liberated. 35 members of Tomi’s family were murdered in the Holocaust.

“In the camp I could not play like a normal child, we didn’t laugh and we didn’t cry. If you stepped out of line at all, you could be beaten up and even beaten to death. I saw it with my own eyes.”

Suzi Diamond

Suzi Diamond was born in Debrecen, Hungary, and was with her mother and brother on the last transport to leave Hungary in 1944 which, miraculously, was diverted from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen. Her mother died just after liberation. Suzi was a very young child when she, too, was found with her brother, Terry, by Dr Bob Collis who also brought them back to Ireland where they were adopted by a Jewish couple, Elsie and Willie Samuels. All of the rest of Suzi’s family perished.

“My brother passed away a few years ago. Now there are only a handful of us Holocaust survivors living in Ireland. Apart from my personal loss, Terry’s passing underlines the importance of telling our story to the next generation. It is important that we pass it on to our children and our children’s children.”

Zoltan Zinn-Collis

Zoltan Zinn-Collis thinks he was four or five years old at the time he was found in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, although no one is sure of his exact date of birth. He was found with his sister Edit, by Han and Dr Bob Collis, a volunteer with the British Red Cross, who helped treat his tuberculosis and other ailments. Eventually, Bob brought him back to Ireland where he reared Zoltan and Edit as part of his own family. Zoltan took Bob’s name as part of his own.

“As I reared my own children and grandchildren, I realised there is a void in our family. There were no grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins while I was growing up – they perished in the Holocaust – and my children and grandchildren are missing them too. It is on family occasions that we become acutely aware of the sense of loss, the absence of close family and relatives.”

Inge Radford

Inge Radford was born in Vienna in 1932 and now lives in Millisle in Northern Ireland. She lost six members of her immediate family in the Holocaust.

“Inge Radford was born in Vienna in 1932 and now lives in Millisle in Northern Ireland. She lost six members of her immediate family in the Holocaust.

“Five of my family were spared the unspeakable ordeal of ghetto living, imprisonment and violent death. That we five grew into relatively unscarred and useful citizens was due to many people – Jewish and non Jewish – who minimised the trauma of family separation and loss for us and for hundreds of other refugee children.”
Ireland and Refugees

As Hitler’s power and influence increased in the 1930s, thousands of German Jews and others opposed to him and to Nazism attempted to flee Germany. The main targets of persecution and discrimination were the Jews. They were gradually excluded from public life, and eventually forced into ghettos and rounded up for deportation. Few could have guessed what lay at the end of those deportation transports.

During the 1930s Ireland was aware of the antisemitism of the Nazi state and the fact that German Jews were being outlawed in their own country. Although no formal policy regarding refugees from Germany was worked out until 1938, the Irish government and civil service effectively determined to allow entry to as few Jews as possible.

There were two basic reasons cited for Ireland’s reluctance to see a large number of refugees - and specifically Jews - enter the country. First, the rate of unemployment in Ireland was such that an influx of people in need of work might damage the economy further. Consequently, the government feared refugees would end up a burden on the state. Secondly, many in government held the view that the arrival of large groups of Jews would result in a rise in antisemitism. This second factor was never stated openly as a reason for the Irish government’s ungenerous response to the refugee crisis.

We do not know how many Jewish refugees applied to come to Ireland, although it is definitely in the hundreds, if not thousands. Only a small percentage of applicants was actually admitted. While it is important to examine Ireland’s reaction to the refugee crisis in the light of the broader historical context, and the policy examples provided by other countries, especially Britain, one cannot ignore a persistent theme about this episode in Irish history: immigrants were not welcome, refugees were not welcome, but Jewish immigrants and Jewish refugees were less welcome than others.

Katrina Goldstone, Ireland and the International Reaction to Jewish Refugees, Dublin 2000

Lady Desart: Kilkenny – Berlin – Tel Aviv

Ellen Odette Bischoffsheim was the granddaughter of Lazar Biedermann, a banker from Bratislava, Slovakia. He lent millions of his own money to the Austrian royal family and also funded the building of the first synagogue in Vienna.

Ellen moved to Kilkenny in 1881 after her marriage to William Cuffe, the 4th Earl of Desart in Cuffsgrange, Co Kilkenny. In 1908, Ellen (now the Countess of Desart) inherited over £15 million on her father’s death and became a very generous benefactress to many Irish causes and other projects abroad.

The first Irish government awarded Lady Desart a Seanad seat for her great works in December 1922 when she became the world’s first female senator and the first Jewish woman to hold that position anywhere in the world. She was appointed for 12 years and served until her death in 1933.

Lady Desart was interested in the Gaelic revival of the time, and became president of the Gaelic League, succeeding her brother-in-law Capt. Othway Cuffe who was mayor of Kilkenny. In her support of the Irish Language Lady Desart reminded the Irish people that her own people, the Jews, had in Palestine revivied a forgotten language and used it to re-unite the scattered remnants of their nation.

She is remembered in Ireland for her support for: Kilkenny Library, the Aut Even Hospital, the Woollen Mills, Kilkenny Woodworkers, Kilkenny Theatre, Desart Hall, the construction of the village of Talbot’s Inch and the Suspension Bridge.

Woodworkers, Kilkenny Theatre, Desart Hall, the construction of the village of Talbot’s Inch and the Suspension Bridge.

Her last great charitable act was the rescue of approximately 20,000 Jewish youth in Berlin in 1933, the year Hitler came to power. Recha Freier, wife of a rabbi in Berlin, initiated what became "Youth Aliyah", the transport of young Jewish people by train and boat from Berlin to Tel Aviv, which was funded by Lady Desart. Her generosity was boundless and she is remembered most especially for her ‘unrecorded’ acts of charity.

Holocaust Memorial Day is a stark and harsh reminder of where racism, bigotry and prejudice can lead. We as a nation must concentrate our efforts and fortify our resolve to build a society that is truly inclusive and which embraces cultural diversity. Racism and hatred have no place in twenty-first century Ireland – a message which is echoed in your theme Learning from the past – lessons for today.

Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, Holocaust Memorial Day 2003
A paper universe - That is more or less how the sorrow-stricken world of east European Jewry has been described as it emerged from the blood-soaked and heinous tragedy known as The Holocaust.

The tempest of fire and ashes that had descended on the Jewish communities of German-occupied Europe left in its wake not cemeteries but books, nothing more than books: documents, albums, testimony, chronicles, intimate journals, and memoirs. This was all that remained - reams and reams of paper - of a rich and glorious past peopled by long lines of erudite and humble rabbis, solitary thinkers, seekers after truth, wealthy merchants and anonymous beggars.

But the enemy did not only annihilate individuals; his aim was also to destroy Jewish social structures, economic foundations, religious and secular, schools, institutions, libraries, workshops, synagogues, and cultural centres - in a word: Jewish communities.
Four million Jewish victims of the Holocaust now identified

Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust museum, has by now managed to identify four million of six million Jews murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators during the second World War.

One and a half million new names were added over the last decade, increasing the list of confirmed victims by 60 per cent, as the museum stepped up efforts to counter Holocaust denial from neo-Nazi groups and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Yad Vashem chairman Avner Shalev said one of the museum’s main aims since it was set up in Jerusalem in 1953 had been to recover every victim’s name and personal story. ‘The Germans sought not only to destroy the Jews but also to erase their memory. One of our main missions is to give each victim a face and a name.’

The figure of six million victims was based on pre-war census lists of Jewish communities in areas occupied by the Nazis. Due to the difficulty of obtaining accurate information, particularly from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Mr Shalev admitted a comprehensive tally was impossible, but said Yad Vashem was aiming to eventually account for five million victims.

In an effort to boost its database, in 2004 Yad Vashem launched its Pages of Testimony project. Visitors to the museum and to its website were encouraged to fill in special forms on the victims, which were then double-checked against existing archival information. The project was a huge success, and 55 per cent of the four million names came from Pages of Testimony.

Names of Jews deported from western European states, such as Germany, France and the Netherlands, were well documented. In the eastern areas occupied by the Nazis, mass killings and an absence of accurate lists of victims created a difficult task for Yad Vashem researchers.

In recent years the museum has focused its efforts on these areas, making significant headway. Whereas in 2005 only 20 per cent of the victims from Ukraine were listed, the figure today is 35 per cent. In Poland the percentage has risen from 35 to 46 per cent.

Mr Shalev said Yad Vashem was co-operating with east European states to obtain extra names from existing archives. ‘We will continue our efforts to recover the unknown names, and by harnessing technology in the service of memory, we are able to share their names with the world.’

Mark Weiss, Jerusalem
The Irish Times, Thursday, December 23, 2010
### We Remember…

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<th>Born At</th>
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- **Note:** Some individuals are listed with a specific age at the time of death, while others are listed as aged X years.
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...We will always remember
Holocaust Memorial Day Candle Lighting

It is traditional at Holocaust memorial events to light six candles in memory of the six million Jews who perished in the Shoah. In Ireland, we also light candles in memory of all of the other victims of Nazi atrocities.

Victim Groups

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:
In memory of people with disabilities and disabling conditions who were murdered, starved to death and forcibly sterilised by doctors and other willing helpers.
Candle-lighters: Deirdre Spain, Inclusion Ireland and John Dolan, CEO, Disability Federation of Ireland.

POLES, SLAVS and ETHNIC MINORITIES:
In memory of millions of Poles and Slavs who were murdered, displaced, and forcibly ‘Aryanised’ by the Nazis; and the thousands of ethnic minorities who were persecuted, murdered and sterilised.
Candle-lighters: Beata Molendowska and Florence Esebamen

GYPSIES (ROMA/SINTI):
In memory of the Romany people of Europe who were rounded up, murdered, displaced and forcibly sterilised by the Nazis.
Candle-lighters: Alexander Krok and Monika Makulova

HOMOSEXUALS:
In memory of homosexual men and women who were persecuted and murdered because of their sexual orientation.
Candle-lighters: Kieran Rose, Chairperson, GLEN, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, and Muriel Walls also of GLEN.

POLITICAL VICTIMS:
In memory of the political opponents of the Nazis – Socialists, Communists, Trade Unionists, Democrats, and other anti-Nazi organisations.
Candle-lighters: Kim Bielenberg, whose grandfather was among those involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944; and Peter Cassells, former General Secretary of Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Chairperson of Holocaust Education Trust Ireland.

CHRISTIAN VICTIMS:
In memory of the Christian victims of all denominations — many of whom saved Jews — who were persecuted and murdered by the Nazis.
Candle-lighters: Rev William Deverell, St. Maelruain’s Parish, Tallaght; and Sister Phil Conroy, Sisters of Sion

JEWISH VICTIMS
Six candles are dedicated to the memory of the six million Jews, including one and a half million children, who were annihilated in the Holocaust by the Nazis and their collaborators. Jews were murdered in the gas chambers, death camps and concentration camps and at hundreds of killing sites; Jews perished in the ghettos of maltreatment, starvation and disease, and Jews were murdered in the streets and in their homes.
Candle-lighters:
Joe Katz, whose mother, Frida, survived Auschwitz.
Sharlette Caplin, whose father, Raphael Urbach, survived Buchenwald and Theresienstadt.
David Phillips, whose father, Geoffrey, escaped to England on the Kindertransports.
Siobhan Zinn-Collins, whose father, Zoltan, survived Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.
Moti Neuman, whose parents, Avraham Yekutiel Neuman and Sheindl Golda (Yaffa) Shtainbock, survived camps in Siberia and the massacre in Bronica forest.
Nurit Tinari-Moda’i, whose grandparents, aunt, and many other family members perished in the Holocaust.
HONOURED GUESTS

Suzi Diamond
Jan Kaminski
Inge Radford
Tomi Reichental
Doris Segal
Edit Zinn-Collis
Zoltan Zinn-Collis

REFERENCES and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IMAGES, PHOTOGRAPHS and ILLUSTRATIONS

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Gate-tower and Ramp: courtesy of Panstwowe Muzeum, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland

Tattooed arms: Getty Images

Rashi, woodcut: from The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages, edited by Historisches Museum der Pfalz, Speyer Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2005

Maimonides Mishneh Torah: from Jewish Art Masterpieces from the Israel Museum, Hugh Lauter Levin Associates Inc., 1994

Mosaic floor: from Jewish Art Masterpieces from the Israel Museum, Hugh Lauter Levin Associates Inc., 1994

Tombstones: Chris Schwarz, © Galicia Jewish Museum, permanent exhibition.

Slave Labour: National archives, Washington

Torched synagogue: Yad Vashem

Kindertransport child: Yad Vashem

Razed synagogue Rymanów, Poland: Chris Schwarz, © Galicia Jewish Museum, permanent exhibition.


Einsatzgruppen in action: Imperial War Museum

Kolin Memorial: Michael Heppner

Torah Scroll images: courtesy of Helen Marks and David Phillips, Dublin Jewish Progressive Congregation

Jews forbidden in Public Places: Yad Vashem, 2004

Avoid Jewish doctors and lawyers: Imperial War Museum

The Mauthausen prisoner orchestra: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem

Oranienburger Strasse synagogue: Photos by Margrit Billeb © Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum

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Righteous Certificate: Yad Vashem

Ernst Leitz II: www.zonezero.com

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The Sisters of Sion
The Council for Christians and Jews
Private donations

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Music: Feilimidh Nunan and Maria Geheran

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Debbie Briscoe, Oliver Donohoe, Clement Esebanen, Yanky Fachler, Chris Harbridge, Lynn Jackson, Estelle Menton, Laura Nagle, Marilyn Taylor

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BOOKLET

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The only public Holocaust memorial monument in Ireland was unveiled in The Garden of Europe in Listowel Co Kerry in May 1995. The occasion marked fifty years since the end of World War II when the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed.

Paddy Fitzgibbon, of the Rotary Club of Listowel, made a very moving speech on that occasion; an excerpt is printed below:

Our generation, and the generation or two after us, will be the last that will be able to say that we stood and shook the hands of some of those who survived. Go home from this place and tell your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren that today in Listowel, you looked into eyes that witnessed the most cataclysmic events ever unleashed by mankind upon mankind. Tell them that you met people who will still be remembered and still talked about and still wept over 10,000 years from now – because if they are not, there will be no hope for us at all. The Holocaust happened and it can happen again, and every one of us, if only out of our own sense of self-preservation, has a solemn duty to ensure that nothing like it ever occurs again.

**Holocaust Memorial Day**

The Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration is designed to cherish the memory of all of the victims of the Nazi Holocaust. A candle-lighting ceremony is an integral part of the commemoration at which six candles are always lit for the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, as well as candles for all of the other victims of the Nazis. The commemoration serves as a constant reminder of the dangers of racism and intolerance and provides lessons from the past that are relevant today.

**Summary of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust**

Issued in January 2000, on the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945 and endorsed by all participating countries, including Ireland.

We, the governments attending the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, recognise that the Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th century, a crisis for European civilisation and a universal catastrophe for humanity. In declaring that the Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation, we share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, and to honour those who stood against it. The horrors that engulfed the Jewish people and other victims of the Nazis must forever be seared in our collective memory. With humanity still scarred by genocide, antisemitism, ethnic cleansing, racism, xenophobia and other expressions of hatred and discrimination, we share a solemn responsibility to fight against these evils. Together with our European partners and the wider international community, we share a commitment to remember the victims who perished, to respect the survivors still with us, and to reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for a democratic and tolerant society, free of the evils of prejudice and other forms of bigotry.

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Learning from the past ~ lessons for today

The Holocaust Memorial Day Committee in association with
The Department of Justice and Equality, Dublin City Council,
Dublin Maccabi Charitable Trust,
Jewish Representative Council of Ireland,
Sisters of Sion, Council for Christians and Jews