Learning from the past ~ lessons for today

The Holocaust Memorial Day Committee in association with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Dublin City Council, Dublin Maccabi Charitable Trust and the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland
The Crocus International Project

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland invites school children to plant yellow crocuses in memory of one and a half million Jewish children and thousands of other children who were murdered during the Holocaust.

_Crocuses planted in the shape of a star of David_
_by pupils of St Martin’s Primary School, Garrison, Co Fermanagh, Northern Ireland_
## Programme

**MC:** Yanky Fachler  
**Voice:** Moya Brennan  
**Piper:** Mikey Smith

- **Introductory remarks:** Yanky Fachler
- **Words of welcome:** Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Eibhlin Byrne
- **Keynote address:** President of Ireland, Mary McAleese
- **The Stockholm Declaration:** Swedish Ambassador to Ireland, Mr Claes Ljungdahl  
  - Musical interlude: Moya Brennan
- **The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform:** Sean Aylward, General Secretary
- **HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR: TOMI REICHENTAL**
- **The Holocaust:** Conor Lenihan TD, Minister for Integration
- **The victims of the Holocaust:** Niall Crowley, former CEO of the Equality Authority
- **Book burning:** Professor Dermot Keogh, University College Cork
- **The Évian Conference:** Judge Catherine McGuinness, President of the Law Reform Commission
- **Visa appeals on behalf of Jews in Europe:** Raphael Siev, former deputy legal advisor, Department Foreign Affairs
- **Hubert Butler:** Julia Crampton  
  - Musical interlude: Mikey Smith
- **HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR: SUZI DIAMOND**
- **Einsatzgruppen:** Olwyn Enright TD
- **Chaim Herzog’s visit to Bergen-Belsen:** Mervyn Taylor
- **Fr Michael Morrison:** Bill Morrison
- **Denis Johnston at Buchenwald:** Jennifer Johnston
- **Scroll of names:** Mercy College, Dublin; St Peter’s College, Dunboyne; Stratford College, Dublin; Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy  
  - Musical interlude: Moya Brennan
- **HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR: JAN KAMINSKI**
- **Reflecting on the Holocaust:** John Tierney, Dublin City Manager
- **Summons:** Micheal O’Siadaidh
- **Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty:** Catherine O’Flaherty
- **Clonyn Castle:** Jonathan Schonfeld
- **A young person from Poland:** Monika Kaliszewska
- **HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR: ZOLTAN ZINN-COLLIS**
- **Go Home from this Place:** Ruairi Quinn TD, Chairperson, Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland
- **Minute’s silence**
- **CANDLE LIGHTING**
- **El Malay Rachamim: Prayer for the Repose of the Souls of the Departed,** Rabbi Zalman Lent and Cantor Alwyn Shulman, Irish Jewish Community
- **Closing remarks:** Yanky Fachler
The Nazi Holocaust –
A systematic programme to annihilate the Jews of Europe

- February 1933 – the first concentration camp, Dachau, is established to hold prisoners arrested after the arson attack on the Reichstag parliament building.
- May 1933 – Nazi students and militiamen light huge public bonfires in which they burn books by Jews, communists and other ‘disruptive’ influences.
- 1933 onwards – Jews are expelled from the army, the civil service, professional associations, sports and social clubs.
- 1935 – The Nuremberg Laws strip Jews of citizenship and define them by racial criteria.
- 35,000 Jewish war veterans who had won medals for bravery during WWI lose their privileges.
- 9 November 1938 – Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). Widespread pogroms against the Jews of Germany and German-controlled lands.
- Euthanasia Programme – murder of people with disabilities. More than 200,000 men, women and children with disabilities are put to death.
- 100,000 Jews die in labour camps between 1939 and 1940.
- Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, SS mobile murder squads known as Einsatzgruppen murder over 2,000,000 civilians, most of them Jews in Russia and eastern Poland.
- Some 500,000 Jews die in ghettos from starvation and disease.
- 30,000 Jewish partisans fight the Nazis in Eastern Europe.
- In the Warsaw Ghetto, more than 100,000 Jews die of starvation and disease; more than 300,000 are deported to the death camps and 7,000 are killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising between 19 April and 16 May 1943.
- 1,000,000 Jews, 70,000 Christian Poles, 23,000 Gypsies, 15,000 Soviet prisoners and thousands of others perish in Auschwitz.
- 1,500,000 Jewish children are murdered in the Holocaust.
- Of the 300,000 Jews who go into hiding, pretend to be Aryans or acquire false identity papers, 100,000 die after capture or betrayal.
- Out of approximately nine and a half million Jews living in Europe before 1939 only one third survive the Holocaust.

One and a half million Jewish children were murdered by the Nazis as well as thousands of other children whom they considered unfit to live. Some of them were children with physical and mental disabilities; black, mixed-race and other ethnic children; Polish, Slav and Gypsy children. Children of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other Christian denominations who resisted the Nazis were destroyed along with children of their political opponents. The Nazis particularly targeted the children in an attempt to destroy the future of all of these groups of people.
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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, as well as candles for all of the other victims. 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.
Holocaust Memorial Day 2009

Message from President McAleese

Holocaust Memorial Day plays a powerful role by shining a light on what happens when racism, bigotry and prejudice are allowed free rein. Commemorating this day underlines the frailty that can exist between different cultures throughout the world and the importance of ensuring that the lessons learned from the Holocaust are not forgotten.

The Holocaust was an unprecedented act of inhumanity involving an attempt at the extermination of an entire race of people. We remember with sorrow the six million Jews that perished along with the millions of others that were annihilated because of their ethnicity, their disability, their sexual orientation, their religious beliefs or their political affiliations.

Ireland’s Holocaust Memorial Day is an important initiative which enables us, in parallel with other countries, to keep in memory the victims of the Holocaust and the horrific suffering they endured and also to honour those people of remarkable courage and character who made a stand against the forces of darkness.

I would like to express my thanks and admiration to the organisers of this important event and to extend to them all my warmest best wishes.

MARY McALEESE
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND
12 January 2009
The Holocaust

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

When Adolf Hitler became leader of the Nazi party in 1921, he stated clearly 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’ soon became euphemisms for annihilation.

It is estimated that 9.6 million Jews lived in what became Nazi-controlled Europe in 1939. By the end of the war in 1945, 3.2 million had survived the Holocaust. Millions of other victims were also murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

Nazi Persecution of the Jews

Humiliation

Identification

Segregation

Concentration

Extinction
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 that 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.
Ettie Steinberg

Ettie Steinberg and her son Leon were the only Irish citizens to die in Auschwitz – their story

Ettie Steinberg's story begins in the former Czechoslovakia. The town of Veretski (Vericky) was the original home of her parents, Aaron Hirsch Steinberg and Bertha Roth. One of seven children, their daughter Esther, known as Ettie, was born there on 11 January 1914.

Some time in the 1920s the family moved to Ireland and settled in Dublin. Living then in a small house, in 28 Raymond Terrace, off Dublin’s South Circular Road, the children attended the nearby St Catherine’s School in Donore Avenue. It is not clear what Ettie did in Dublin between leaving school and her marriage, but she certainly did work as a seamstress for a time. Her sister Faige, now Fanny Frankel of Toronto, recalled in 2008 that “Ettie had ‘golden hands’ and was an excellent and creative seamstress.” She mentioned that Ettie had been “apprenticed to the best seamstress in Dublin”, and that she had “treasured a suit that Ettie had made for her.” Another family member has been recorded as describing Ettie as “a beautiful girl, tall and slim with wonderful hands. She was a fantastic dressmaker and embroiderer.”

On mainland Europe another family’s story was evolving, and there Ettie’s future husband was growing up. Vogtjeck (Chaksel) Gluck was a son of Alexander Gluck and Ruzana Grunfeld, of Romanian origin. Ruzana had remarried and was living in Antwerp with her new husband, Wullinger Salomon. Vogtjeck Gluck has been described as being the ‘son of an orthodox family of goldsmiths’, but it is not entirely clear whether this description refers to the Gluck or Salomon connections. Vogtjeck himself did become a goldsmith, and there were certainly Gluck family goldsmiths in Antwerp at that time. Indeed, the noted Antoinette Gluck was a daughter of Antwerp goldsmiths. Antoinette, who married Rabbi David Feurwerker, was, with her husband, active in the French Resistance during the war. She and her colleague, Germaine Ribiere, (recognised as Righteous among the Nations), are remembered for organising the evacuation of young Jewish people. In later years Antoinette was involved with the financing of the immigration ship The Exodus. The links between Vogtjeck and Antoinette are hazy, but there may be a clue in the fact that one of Antoinette’s brothers was called Salomon, the surname of Vogtjeck’s mother’s second husband.

Ettie Steinberg and Vogtjeck Gluck were married on 22 July 1937 in the Greenville Hall Synagogue on the South Circular Road in Dublin. (Ironically, that same synagogue was to be damaged in one of the very few German bombing attacks on Dublin in the Second World War.)

Following their marriage, the young couple moved to Vogtjeck’s family business in Antwerp, setting up home at Steenbokstraat 25. A year or so later, aware of the gathering dangers for the Low Countries, they moved to France and their son, Leon, was born in Paris on 28 March 1939. They then moved south, where they settled.

After moving from place to place in France for two years, in late 1942 the young family found themselves in a hotel in Toulouse. At this time, round-ups of Jews were taking place in the south of France with the approval of the Vichy government, a puppet régime of Nazi Germany. Ettie, Vogtjeck and Leon were discovered and arrested.

Ettie Steinberg and her son Leon were the only Irish citizens to die in Auschwitz. Their story...
It passed the censors and found its way to Dublin. The postcard was coded with Hebrew terms and read:

Uncle Lechem, we did not find, but we found Uncle Tisha B’Av.

Ettie’s family understood her tragic message very well: ‘Lechem’ is the Hebrew word for bread and ‘Tisha B’Av’ is a Jewish fast day commemorating the destruction of the temple.

The Steinberg family tried desperately to find out what had become of their daughter, writing to the Red Cross and even the Vatican.

Now living in Israel, Freda Steinberg (wife of Ettie’s late brother Solomon) recalled in 2008, “In August 1947 Solly and I were in a kosher restaurant in Prague, where we met many survivors. One of them told us that they had escaped from Antwerp together with Ettie and family and made their difficult way to the south of France, where they slept in different houses most nights. There was a period of relative quiet at one time and so Ettie decided that she would stay where they were. Unfortunately she didn’t take the advice of their friends and that was the night when she, her husband and child were taken.”

The family were taken to Drancy, a transit camp outside Paris. Freda Steinberg continues, “Solly went to Yad Vashem to see if the Gluck name appeared in any records and, sure enough, details were given of the date they were sent to Auschwitz, the number of the train, which carriage, and the time it left France – true German thoroughness….The Glucks were deported from Drancy on 2 September 1942 at 8.55am and arrived in Auschwitz on 4 September. One could assume that they were put to death immediately and that the Yahrzeit would be as from 4 September 1942.”

That, then, is the story of Ettie Steinberg. She and her son Leon were the only Irish citizens to perish in Auschwitz. Her story is particular to her, but it is also the story of so many millions more. It is linked to them, just as Ettie is linked to the stories of the surviving members of her family.

Ettie’s sister Fanny married Isaac Frankel. He too had a story. Born in Poland, he’d been a journalist for a daily Yiddish newspaper there. He happened to be on assignment in London when Germany attacked Poland. He made his way to Ireland, where he met and married Fanny. The sole survivor of his family, he became a teacher and rabbi in Dublin, earning his PhD in Trinity College. He later emigrated to Canada. His children Joshua and Sheva still live there.

Of Ettie’s other sisters, Rosie (now living in London) married Mr Schleider, and Bessie married Yakov Safran. Their son is David Safran. Their daughter Leah (Frohwein) was born in Dublin, and now lives in Toronto. Another daughter is Esther Warmberg. Mr Safran now lives in Manchester, as does Ettie’s brother Jack.

Ettie’s young brother Joshua Solomon (Solly) was educated at Dublin’s Wesley College, and thence Trinity College. He graduated the same year his sister died in Auschwitz. He was to become a professor at the Technion in Haifa.

The family connections of Ettie Steinberg are thus spread widely around the world, mirroring in many ways the similar emigration of the general Irish population of the time. But Ettie’s older brother Louis stayed in Dublin. He married Myra Herman, and he was the founder of the once well known Irish transport company, Camac. Of his two sons, David went into that business with him, while Stanley became a doctor in England. David is now in retirement in Israel, Stanley in the UK.

In 1975 Louis and David Steinberg erected the gates at the Beth Olam in Dublin’s Dolphin’s Barn cemetery in memory of their father. Aaron Hirsh Steinberg had lived to a great age, a much respected figure in Ireland’s Jewish community. In addition to his daughter Ettie, he himself had lost three brothers and many other family members in the Holocaust. He died in 1968, and his wife, Lena Steinberg, in 1973. Louis himself was buried in that cemetery in 1981.

All those dates are a long time from 1942, that gulf illustrating the years of life taken from Ettie and her family. The lives that she and her family would have lived are hidden from us, hidden from us in a darkness – the sort of darkness that we can only illuminate by remembering.

Conan Kennedy

The Holocaust raises in a most awful way the darkest questions the mystery of evil has put to the human race in recent times. We may never get to the bottom of these questions – because, for something this evil, there is in the end no explanation the mind can accept. However, what we cannot explain we must nevertheless remember. The warning contained in memory is our protection, and it is essential to ensure that something like the Holocaust never happens again. Unfortunately, the evil that turns man against man, cheapening, degrading and destroying life, still lurks in the world.

Mary Hanafin TD, Minister for Education and Science, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, 29 January 2006
Ireland and Neutrality during World War II

Five European nations remained neutral during World War II: Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. Éamon de Valera, President of Ireland at the time, took a resolute stance on Ireland’s neutrality – one he stood by throughout the entire war period. *We resolved that the aim of our policy would be to keep our people out of a war. I said in the Dáil that with our history, with our experiences of the last war, and with part of our country still unjustly severed from us, we felt that no other decision and no other policy was possible.*

Within Ireland itself, there was almost total support for neutrality, which seemed the most logical option militarily and politically. It did not imply hostility to Britain, but expressed the Irish government’s responsibility for the survival of the state and welfare of its citizens. In *That Neutral Island* by Clair Wills, the author explains that there was the pragmatic argument that it was impossible for Ireland to choose belligerence given the country’s lack of defences. But there was also the emotional argument that stemmed from a fear of a return to the internal conflicts of the recent past, which might occur if the population were asked to make common cause with Britain.

The Irish government had a simple solution for people who wanted to express their support for the war and the fight against fascism: Éamon de Valera made it clear he would place no restrictions on individuals joining the British forces, or leaving for war work in Britain. There are various estimates that range between 50,000 and 150,000 as the number of Irishmen who served in the British forces during World War II.

On 1 January 1941 three bombs were dropped between Drogheda and Julianstown. The following day, a bomb fell at Borris, Co Carlow, killing three people. That same night three bombs fell in Wexford, four in Dublin and three more at the Curragh racecourse. More than 20 people were injured and 40 were made homeless.

Dublin was attacked once more when bombs fell on the North Strand area on 30 May 1941. Thirty-four people were killed, several hundred injured, and three hundred houses destroyed. President de Valera protested to the German government, who apologised for the ‘accident,’ claiming it may have been caused by British interference with Luftwaffe radio beams. But it was also because by then Belfast had been blitzed, with huge casualties.

As has been documented by Wills and others, the bombing of Belfast in the spring of 1941 once again brought the question of Ireland’s neutrality to prominence and it was again hotly debated. The Belfast blitz confirmed that Ireland was not immune to the war, and strengthened the South’s neutral resolve – nobody wanted to bring the bombs down on themselves.

Nearly nine hundred people were killed in the Belfast raid, more in one night than almost any attack on the United Kingdom throughout the war. Offers were made from the Republic of ambulance and fire services and refuge for those affected by the air raids. In a speech in Castlebar President de Valera said: *In the past, and probably the present too, a number of them did not see eye to eye with us politically, but they are all our people – we are one and the same people – and their sorrows in the present instance are our sorrows.*

For the population of southern Ireland, ‘the Emergency’ meant restrictive legislation, censorship, shortages and rationing. For the worst hit it meant poverty, unemployment and emigration. To some it seemed that Ireland’s neutral stance was of no help in their daily lives.

A week after Pearl Harbour (7 December 1941), Éamon de Valera gave a speech in Cork in which he sought to reassert the bonds of transatlantic friendship, without giving way on matters of principle: *There is scarcely a family here which has not a member or near relative in that country. In addition to the ties of blood there has been between our two nations a long association of friendship and regard, continuing uninterruptedly from America’s own struggle for independence down to our own. Many were concerned America would lose patience with Ireland’s neutrality and overt gestures, such as surveillance of Axis legations, were undertaken.*

Although determined to remain firm regarding Ireland’s neutrality during the war, there had been several approaches to Éamon de Valera urging him to side with the Allies. The most urgent was probably Churchill’s 1940 offer of *Irish unity* (an offer de Valera did not believe would be delivered); his famous telegram to the Irish leader the day after Pearl Harbor: *Now is your chance. Now or never. “A nation once again.” Am very ready to meet you at any time.* It is clear the Taoiseach was not easily persuaded to accept this tempting offer of Ireland’s unification. Perhaps de Valera felt the risks too great and
popular support for neutrality too overwhelming to take
the offer seriously.

By mid May 1945, the first parties of British and American
politicians and international observers visited the Nazi
concentration camps, generating pictures and
commentary. People faced the sudden realisation that
their worst fears about Germany’s persecution of the Jews
could not compare with the reality that was then revealed.

European heads of state were being made aware of what
was happening to the Jews since 1942, but there was a
huge gulf between what was known by prime ministers
and ordinary citizens’ information about the Jewish
catastrophe. Clair Wills (That Neutral Island) tells us that
scepticism in Ireland was scarcely surprising given the
disbelief with which many in Britain and the rest of Europe
greeted reports. The lack of straightforward coverage was
also due to a form of censorship conditioning. Barely a
week after the censorship was lifted, no newspaper was
ready to print something which six years had accustomed
them to not believing.

Neutral Ireland and specifically Dublin became a magnet
for returning émigrés and some refugees. Artists, writers
and musicians now chose Dublin as their cultural centre.
There were those who chose Ireland who had never lived
there before. Probably the most famous was the German
theoretical physicist Erwin Shrodinger, who found a niche
at de Valera’s new Institute for Advanced Study.

Concerning refugees, the Irish policy is considered to have
been illiberal and ungenerous. Policy towards them was
determined more by fear of civil unrest than by charitable
concern. After the war, the Irish government agreed that,
having been spared the horrors of war, Ireland had a duty
to help those less fortunate, including civilians in
Germany. The Dáil voted through donations for food to
alleviate post-war starvation in Europe.

It is said that neutrality was not something to be boastful
about but to be thankful for. The consensus in Ireland has
always been one of support for Éamon de Valera’s
determination to keep Ireland neutral and out of the war.

In Ireland, we mark this day collectively and for the first time officially in this city.

Although we did not participate collectively in the war which served as the back-drop to the
Holocaust, our State’s formative years coincided with the flood-tide of evil which brought it
about. We must acknowledge our own failings as a society and as a State in these events.

Although our constitution was remarkable in its time for its explicit recognition and guarantees
for Ireland’s Jewish community, and although our elected government always upheld in public the
rights of those who faced persecution for their race and their religion, and although many good
Irish people courageously stood against the persecutors in word and in deed, at home and
abroad, it remains the case that our State and our society in many ways failed that constitutional
recognition, whether by tolerating social discrimination, or by failing to offer refuge to those who
sought it, or by failing to confront those who openly or covertly offered justification for the
prejudice and race-hatred which led to the Shoah.

The light of history has been shone on many such failings and I think it appropriate today,
holding the office that I do, to formally acknowledge the wrongs that were covertly done by act
and omission by some who exercised the executive power in our society in breach of the spirit of
the Constitution and contrary to the common values of humanity.

Michael McDowell TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
first Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2003
The Death of Hitler

Adolf Hitler was declared dead on 1 May 1945. The next day, despite vigorous objection from his colleagues and advisors, Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera, visited the home of Dr Edouard Hempel, the head of the German legation in Dublin, to sign the book of condolences. He was followed the next day by Michael McDunphy, private secretary to President Douglas Hyde.

The presence of Axis legations in Dublin had been a prominent feature of Allied propaganda directed against Irish neutrality, and news of de Valera’s visit provoked international outrage. It came just two weeks after the liberation of the concentrations camps at Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen, newsreels about which had revealed to the world the extent of Nazi persecution of the Jews. To express sympathy to Germany at such a time was incomprehensible to the world. The international community could not understand how the revelations of such horrifying activity should not have negated the demands of diplomatic etiquette.

Britain and America stopped short of withdrawing their envoys for consultation, but only just. The Irish policy on neutrality was now very much in disrepute. It was seen in some circles as tantamount to support for Germany.

Éamon de Valera defended himself by stating that he had simply been observing the demands of protocol for a country with whom his own had diplomatic relations. Whatever his private views, he stated that he was bound, as the head of a neutral state, to adhere to form, and the visit meant nothing more than that. It is important, he said, that it should never be inferred that these formal acts imply the passing of any judgements good or bad. In a letter to Robert Brennan in Washington, de Valera explained the visit as merely ‘correct diplomatic procedure’:

I could have had a diplomatic illness but, as you know, I would scorn that sort of thing... So long as we retained our diplomatic relations with Germany, to have failed to call upon the German representative would have been an act of unpardonable discourtesy to the German nation and to Dr Hempel himself.

The incident, however, became an infamous and defining feature of international perception of Ireland’s neutrality during World War II. It also caused a rift between the Taoiseach and Dublin’s Jewish community, some of whose most prominent members Éamon de Valera counted as close friends.

Hitler’s death: Hyde also expressed condolences

President Douglas Hyde joined taoiseach Éamon de Valera in expressing official condolences to Nazi Germany on the death of Adolf Hitler, newly released State papers reveal.

A book recording messages of sympathy sent by the Office of the President between 1938 and 1957 showed an entry for Hitler’s death on May 1st, 1945, according to a presidential protocol record released with the 1975 papers. It said no message of condolence was telegraphed to the relevant country, as was the norm in such cases, “as the capital of Germany, Berlin, was under siege and no successor had been appointed”.

However, the secretary to the president was said to have called on “His Excellency, the German minister, Dr Hempel” on May 3rd, 1945. On the previous day, the then taoiseach Eamon de Valera and external affairs minister Joe Walshe had visited the Dún Laoghaire home of Dr Edouard Hempel, minister at the German legation in Dublin between 1937 and 1945, to express their condolences on behalf of the State.

Commentators have since criticised de Valera’s actions, and some have suggested the former taoiseach may have been sympathetic to Nazi Germany. But the discovery, in this year’s State papers, that the president offered his condolences over the death of Hitler suggests both men may merely have been following protocol under the circumstances.

The book detailing the intervention of president Hyde was contained in a batch of documents released by the office to the secretary to the president. It noted the president had received no direct notification of Hitler’s death but had learned of the event from a press report on May 2nd, 1945.

As for the outcome of the secretary’s visit to Dr Hempel, the document recorded that the German minister called on the secretary to the president — also on May 3rd. It further noted that flags remained at full mast over Áras an Uachtaráin on the occasion of Hitler’s death — in contrast to the death of US president Franklin D Roosevelt in April 1945, when flags were lowered for four days.

Among the eleven other public figures listed in the book were Pope Pius XI, whose death in February 1939 was marked by messages of sympathy both to Rome and the Apostolic Nuncio in Dublin, as well as half-masting of flags for five days; and Eva Peron, whose death in July 1952 received a more modest reaction.

A telegram was sent to the Argentine president Juan Domingo Peron but flags remained at full mast. “Deceased was only wife of head of state,” a note explained.

Joe Humphreys © 2005 The Irish Times
Friday, December 30, 2005
Antisemitism in Ireland during the 1930s and 1940s

The Irish Jewish community has experienced little antisemitism throughout its history in Ireland. The Irish public has generally been tolerant and respectful towards the small and law-abiding Jewish community, but a minority of people has occasionally worked to its detriment. In the years preceding the Second World War, there were a few antisemitic forces at work in Ireland.

Some conservative members of the Catholic clergy viewed Jews as morally dangerous to the Christian population and believed that Jews were linked to communism and were therefore a political threat. One, Fr Denis Fahey, wrote that the Jews were an international people and were contemptuous towards the patriotic feelings of the natives of the countries where they lived. Another, Fr Edward Cahill, held the view that the international press and cinema were controlled by Jews, who used them to corrupt western society.

The Blueshirts

General Eoin O’Duffy, sacked as Garda Commissioner, became leader of the Army Comrades Association in 1933, the same year Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. He renamed the organisation The National Guard; it would become better known as the Blueshirts. Under O’Duffy, the Blueshirts took on elements of Italian Fascism. They rejected comparisons with the Nazi party. Members were required to be both Irish and Christian. They wore paramilitary-style uniforms, held rallies and used the Nazi salute. It is certain that they counted antisemites among their members. The Blueshirts were outlawed late in 1933 and never gained widespread public support.

The Irish Christian Rights Protection Association

Early in 1939 a campaign of intimidation was carried out against Dublin Jews, which consisted of letters warning Jews to leave the country. The words ‘Boycott Jews’ were painted on walls around the city. Gardaí believed that one person, George Griffin of the Irish Christian Rights Protection Association, was behind the campaign. It was believed that Griffin was basically harmless but that he might have been manipulated by more sinister forces such as the Nazi presence in Dublin.

There were several other radical Christian organisations in existence before World War II that carried undercurrents of antisemitism. The 1916 Veterans’ Association declared themselves opposed to ‘alien immigration’ and the Irish-Ireland Research Society warned against the ‘evils engendered by Jewish propaganda’. The gardaí, after investigating the latter group, concluded that once again only one person had been behind it, and may have been funded by Dublin Nazis.

Antisemitism in Dáil Éireann

In 1943, at the height of the war and the Holocaust, the undercurrent of antisemitism in Irish culture found its way into Dáil Éireann. Oliver J Flanagan was elected that year as TD for the constituency of Laois-Offaly. His Monetary Reform party, which existed only in that part of the country, purported to lessen what they saw as excessive Jewish and Masonic control of Irish banking and finance. During his maiden speech in the Dáil, as part of a debate on emergency orders, Flanagan declared: I am very sorry that I cannot associate myself with this bill…because I have seen that most of these Emergency Acts were always directed against Republicanism. How is it that we do not see any of these Acts directed against the Jews, who crucified Our Saviour nineteen hundred years ago, and who are crucifying us every day in the week? How is it that we do not see them directed against the Masonic Order?

He went on:

There is one thing that Germany did, and that was to rout the Jews out of their country. Until we rout the Jews out of this country it does not matter a hair’s breadth what orders you make.

There was no protest to Flanagan’s outburst from any member of the chamber.

There can be no place in the City of Dublin, which has enjoyed a long and positive relationship with the Jewish community, for the manifestations of antisemitism such as we witnessed in recent weeks. Racist behaviour of this sort must serve as a timely wake-up call for greater vigilance. I call on all members of Irish society to renew their commitment to embrace a more inclusive and more culturally diverse future together.

Councillor Michael Conaghan, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2005
Sabina Wizniak grew up in a vibrant area of Berlin in the 1920s and 30s where her father was a diamond merchant. After Hitler came to power, life became very difficult for German Jews. Eventually, the Wizniak family were moved to an overcrowded Jewish ghetto in Poland, where conditions were squalid and where thousands died from overcrowding, starvation and disease. The inhabitants of the ghetto lived under the constant threat of brutality and murder by the SS, and of deportation to the concentration and death camps.

Sabina’s father had managed to escape to Ireland. He sent Sabina a letter requesting her to join him. They made up a story about a sick aunt in Ireland and, unusually, an embassy official was sufficiently affected by Sabina’s pleas to allow her a four-week visa to Ireland. Sabina’s mother Dora, and younger sister, Asta, remained in the ghetto with no way of escape. Her mother was murdered and Asta was taken to Majdanek concentration camp, where she died.

After Sabina’s four-week visa for Ireland expired, she was obliged to return to Poland and was sent to Belfast, from where she was to depart. A civil servant met her at the railway station, tasked with making sure she left the jurisdiction. However, the official let Sabina go, promising to pretend he had seen her leave the country.

Unable to meet openly with her father, Sabina found accommodation on Dublin’s South Circular Road, with the Stapleton family, whose kindness made her feel welcome and secure. Soon, however, she found out that Mr Stapleton was a member of An Garda Síochána. Knowing that her illegal status could cause serious problems for him – and that his occupation could cause serious problems for her – she resolved to leave immediately. When she told Mr Stapleton her intentions, however, he winked and said that she could leave only if she didn’t like it there. Sabina realised that he had known about her all along. She lived in the Stapleton house for three and a half years.

Sabina grew up and got engaged to a furrier from London named Monty Shorts. Before their wedding she applied for a residence permit in an effort to make her status official. She was granted the permit on condition that she paid a small fine for having lived in the country illegally. Later she was told that the Aliens Office had known of her presence for years.

The story of Sabina Shorts has been made into a short film called Blind Eye.

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 that included the United States, Britain, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, Ireland and others, none was willing to take in 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: *England was not a country of immigration and that British colonies and territories weren’t either.* Canada said: *no Jew is too many.*


The chief delegate from Ireland, FT Cremins, told the conference that the amount of land available in Ireland, a country dependent on agriculture, was insufficient for its own population, who were forced to emigrate in large numbers. Cremins declared that Ireland had more qualified doctors than were required to care for the people’s health and that other professions were similarly oversubscribed. He concluded:

*It is for these reasons that we are not in a position to contribute in any appreciable degree to the solution of this urgent problem, and we are naturally anxious not to promise more than we could hope to perform.*

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

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 thought refugees might damage the economy further and 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.

The Irish Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees

In November 1938 a committee was formed to manage the huge number of applications for entry to Ireland. The Irish Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees sought to bring together the work of various other organisations, such as the Society of Friends Germany Emergency Committee, the Church of Ireland Jews’ Society, the Jewish Standing Committee for Refugees, and the Irish Committee for Austrian Relief.

The committee came to an agreement with the Department of Justice, which ultimately decided whether visa applications were refused or granted. Some refugees would be allowed admittance under a quota system. The initial quotas totalled ninety people, of whom twenty were children. These refugees, however, were to be Christians with Jewish blood rather than professing Jews.

The government began to refer all visa applications to the Committee, and soon it became in effect the only channel by which refugees from Germany and Nazi-occupied territories could apply to enter Ireland. Although Britain extended its own quota system when the scale of the crisis became apparent, Ireland’s quotas, which were tiny in comparison, did not change. Hundreds and probably thousands of people applied to come to Ireland but only a small percentage gained admittance.

The Holocaust was one of the greatest outrages against humanity in all recorded history. It was so bad that people living in the comparative sanity of this country should hardly be blamed for not anticipating the lunacy of Hitler, or his henchmen. But the fact still remains that we sat by in mute indifference while the greatest outrage of modern times was being perpetrated, and we should learn from our mistakes.

Sean Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, St Patrick’s Day, 2004
Visa Appeals

Many appeals for refuge in Ireland were made by or on behalf of Jewish people fleeing Nazi persecution before and during World War II. Some were successful and a handful of refugee visas were granted as a result. However, the illiberal policy of the Irish government towards European refugees initiated during the mid-1930s and crystallised at the Évian Conference in 1938, meant that many more requests fell on deaf ears.

A letter had arrived from the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Isaac Herzog, in October 1938. As Chief Rabbi of Ireland, Herzog had been leader of Ireland’s Jewish community until the previous year and enjoyed a close friendship with the Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera. His letter was addressed to the Taoiseach personally and contained the following: I am appealing to you to admit a quota of Jewish refugee doctors and dentists to practise in Eire on the same conditions as in the United Kingdom. A considerable number have been admitted into England and allowed to set up practices. I do not know the exact figures, but I have an idea that on the basis of numerical proportion the Eire quota would amount to six or seven. In view of the noble stand which you have made on behalf of those unfortunate victims of blind hatred, we entertain the hope that this petition of ours will receive your most favourable consideration.

In April 1938, the Minister for Justice, Patrick Ruttledge, expanded on Ireland’s policy towards Jewish refugees in a letter to the Fianna Fáil TD Robert Briscoe. He wrote: the Jewish community in this country should not be increased by way of immigration, except in cases where the immigrant is a definite acquisition to the State. It seems, however, that people judged ‘acquisitions to the State’ did not include a group of intellectuals possessing high levels of professional and technical training, on whose behalf a refugee appeal was made in November 1938. The Comité International pour le Placement des Intellectuels Réfugiés (International Committee for the Settlement of Refugee Intellectuals) sent a letter to the Department of Industry and Commerce stating the following: As appears from enclosed leaflet, my Committee’s aim is to assist intellectuals of all creeds, compelled to leave their country on account of their origin or political opinions, in finding a new home in states which do not discriminate between their inhabitants on religious or political grounds. Being under the impression that Eire is one of these States and might be prepared to offer hospitality to some categories of our unfortunate clients, I should like to point out to you that there are amongst them a certain number of highly qualified, certificated engineers and technicians whose knowledge and experience would prove an asset to the industry of any country. Would you be good enough to let us know if entry into Eire and a permit to work could be granted to some of these people? If so, we would, naturally, forward to you full details as to their past career as well as copies of their certificates in order to facilitate your judgment and choice.

No reply to either of these letters is recorded in government files.

Towards the end of the war, the truth about the Holocaust became known to the world. The plight of refugees was now horribly apparent. From then on, de Valera responded positively to requests to let Jews into Ireland. The Irish government became involved in several diplomatic initiatives to help people stranded in Europe, but by this stage Ireland’s intervention produced little result.

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
October 9, 1938.

His Excellency
Mr. Daniel de Valera
Premier
Eire.

Dear Mr. de Valera,

I am appealing to you to admit a quota of Jewish refugees, doctors and dentists to practice in Eire on the same conditions as in the United Kingdom.

A considerable number have been admitted into England and allowed to set up practices. I do not know the exact figures, but I have an idea that on the basis of numerical proportion the Eire quota would amount to six or seven. Your private secretary could ascertain the exact figures on enquiring of the Refugee Committee, Tabum House, Upper Tabum Place, London W.C.I. Perhaps Eire might feel particularly interested in Jewish doctors and dentists of a particular area or locality within the zone of anti-Semitic persecution. The Refugee Committee would be only too glad to place all information at Your Excellency’s disposal.

In view of the noble stand which you have made in behalf of those unfortunate victims of blind hatred, we entertain the hope that this petition of ours will receive your most favourable consideration.

With anticipatory thanks,

Faithfully yours,

[Signature]

Chief Rabbi of Palestine.
I was born in Schneidemühl, a small town in West Prussia. After the increase of antisemitism and persecution, our family moved to Frankfort on Maine in 1937. During this time my parents and I (my brother was already in Palestine) waited for our quota number to the United States. It should have arrived in about 1941.

After ‘Kristallnacht’ in November 1938 my parents wrote to the people they knew who had already left Germany, hoping someone would at least take me in.

Mrs Hollander, a good friend of my parents, was living in Dublin and was approached by Dr & Mrs Teller, who wanted to adopt a refugee child (still in Germany) about the age of their son. Stranger then fiction, their letters crossed.

Now begins the unsavoury part of the story. However much they tried to bring a nine-year-old child to Ireland, the Irish Consul in Berlin was adamant in his refusal.

The matter was brought to the attention of Robert Briscoe TD. He arranged a meeting with Prime Minister Éamon de Valera, together with Reverend Herzog, who was in Ireland on a visit at the time. Within two weeks I was in Ireland.

Dr Teller was a botanist educator and one of the founders of the Dalton School and Stratford College. He also taught in the Talmud Tora School on Bloomfield Avenue.

In 1941 my parents left Europe on the last passenger ship before America entered the war in December. As soon as they arrived in America they contacted us. After the war I joined them in New York City.

The Teller family moved to London and remains warm as always. (The Tellers always made me feel how lucky they were to have me.) Today we often make many visits between London and Israel and we are frequently in touch with the Teller family.

I would like to point out again how grateful we are to the Briscoe family. We have met and spoken to Joe and Debbie Briscoe when they have visited Israel, and have also met their son Dr Daniel Briscoe (who lives in Israel).

Michael Falk
Ernst Scheyer

Dr Ernst Scheyer was born in Silesia in 1890, to a liberal Jewish family who owned a grain business. He fought in the First World War, and was awarded the Iron Cross. He later studied and attained a PhD in law. He married Marie Margareta Epstein and, together with her and their two children, Heinz and Renate, lived a comfortable life. He built a successful legal practice in Liegnitz, becoming an active and respected member of the local Jewish community.

When Hitler introduced his anti-Jewish legislation in 1935, however, Scheyer lost his status as a notary and his court accreditation. The family were forced to move house and to live in much straitened circumstances.

On the night of 9 November 1938 (Kristallnacht), Scheyer was one of thousands of Jewish men who were rounded up and imprisoned. He was taken to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, north of Berlin. This treatment placed him and his fellow internees under huge pressure to emigrate. Indeed, some were only released when relatives could produce proof of the right to settle in another country.

Luckily for the Scheyer family, Heinz had begun his studies at Trinity College, Dublin, a year previously. He secured a one-month visa for his parents, which would enable them to travel to England and Ireland. Ernst and Marie arrived in Ireland on 14 January 1939. They stayed at 67 Kenilworth Square, Dublin.

Ernst was unable to practise as a lawyer in Ireland. His situation was made more difficult by the fact that the Nazi government removed his German citizenship several months later. This did not endear him to the Irish government, which was wary of those who might not be able to return eventually to their countries of origin. The Irish military intelligence service, G2, kept a close eye on Scheyer from the time of his arrival.

Scheyer began to work as a travelling salesman. After a short spell in Northern Ireland, he began to teach German privately, then obtained positions in St Andrew’s and St Columba’s Colleges.

In the late 1940s Scheyer became a respected member of the Dublin Jewish community. He was instrumental in founding the Progressive Synagogue and very active among the city’s liberal Jews. Indeed, the first wedding in that community was that of his own daughter, Renate. The Dublin Jewish Progressive Congregation is still going strong.

Scheyer retained a passionate love for the German language, literature and culture all his life. In 1947 he was given the prestigious post of Assistant in German at Trinity College, Dublin. He made a strong impact on the life of the university and a prize was founded in his name after his death.

Ernst Scheyer died on a visit to his son Heinz in Birmingham in 1958, at the age of 68. The conditions in Sachsenhausen had weakened his general health and most probably shortened his life. Marie, his widow, lived for some time with Renate and her husband in Belfast. However, finding that the Troubles evoked painful memories of Germany before the war, she moved to Birmingham, where she lived out her last years with her son Heinz. Both Ernst and Marie are buried in Dublin.

Extracted from: German-speaking exiles in Ireland 1933-1945

Dublin is proud of its association with Ireland’s Jewish community, which dates back more than 150 years. Although the numbers of the Jewish community may have diminished, we are mindful of the contribution Jews have made to Ireland in the professions, business, the arts, academia and in all walks of life.

Councillor Catherine Byrne, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2006
The Hat Factories

The impoverished state of the west of Ireland in the 1930s prompted the Irish government to send a trade delegation to Europe to explore the possibility of attracting European industries to relocate to Ireland. The delegation succeeded in bringing two hat factories and one ribbon factory to the region.

Spear-headed by the Minister for Trade, Sean Lemass, and Senator John E McEllinn, the delegation also included Marcus Witztum (a Polish-born Jew) and other Jewish businessmen, who set off for France. They visited a small hat factory called Les Modes Modernes, owned by a French Jew, Henri Orbach. He had invited his brother-in-law Serge Phillipson to leave Berlin and work with him in France. Henri agreed to move his factory to Galway, and sent Serge to run the business there in November 1937. At the opening of Les Modes Modernes in Galway, business was boosted when the Bishop of Galway encouraged his lady parishioners to wear hats instead of head-scarves to Mass. Serge was joined in Galway by his wife Sophie and their daughter Rachel, but soon afterwards, mother and daughter made the tragic mistake of returning to Paris for Sophie to be with her elderly mother and for Rachel to attend school there. Sophie was eventually arrested by the French police and sent, via Drancy, to a concentration camp where she perished. Rachel survived the war and was reunited with her father in Ireland. She currently lives in Canada.

Shortly after the establishment of Les Modes Modernes, McEllin and Witztum were instrumental in bringing a second hat factory to the west of Ireland. In 1938, Belgian designers began work on the factory for Western Hats in Castlebar, Co Mayo. It opened for business in 1940 under the watchful eye of Frank Schmolka, who originally came from Prague. Several Czech and Slovak Jewish families came to Ireland to work in Western Hats, causing the locals to designate the Blackfort area of Castlebar ‘Little Jerusalem’. The factory was officially opened by Sean Lemass and blessed by the Bishop of Galway. During its lifetime, Western Hats employed hundreds of local people, and even had its own football team!

The third factory to move from continental Europe to Ireland was the Hirsch Ribbon Factory. Erskine Childers, then TD for Athlone-Longford, campaigned for the establishment of a factory in Longford. Emil Hirsch became the only Jew in Austria who managed to ship his entire factory out of the country after the 1938 Anschluss (when Germany forcibly annexed Austria). In March 1939, the Irish Minister for Finance signed a 30-year lease agreement with John McEllin and Marcus Witztum for the disused Connolly Army Barracks on Battery Road in Longford Town.

Emil became the Managing Director of Hirsch Ribbons, and his son Robert was General Manager. Ruby Burns, who spoke fluent German, translated for managers and staff and later became Robert’s wife. Their two children,
Desmond and Jenny, also worked in the factory and later in the Dublin sales office. The establishment of these enterprises in Ireland, which facilitated the move out of Europe for several Jewish families, was achieved through the intercession of Marcus Witztum, Serge Phillipson and other prominent businessmen. They used their excellent negotiating skills and provided the funds necessary to procure passports and entry visas for the Jewish refugees.

When Robert Hirsch first arrived in Longford, he shared lodgings with George Klaar (Clare), author of *Last Waltz in Vienna*, which tells the family story. George’s father, Ernst, was dismissed from his job at the bank in Vienna because he was a Jew. He was put in contact with Emil Hirsch, who arranged for Ernst to be included among the ‘experts’ who would move to Ireland with the ribbon factory. While waiting in Berlin for his Irish visa, Ernst took up work in a Paris bank. His wife, Stella, and son, George, remained in Berlin to wait for their visas. Despite inexplicable delays and prevarication, Stella and George received their visas the morning after Kristallnacht in November 1938.

Stella and George reached Longford, where they joined the Hirsch family. Although Ernst eventually received his Irish visa in Paris, he also made the fatal mistake of remaining in France instead of leaving immediately for Ireland. Stella missed her husband so much that she left the safety of Ireland to join him in Paris, arriving the day after war was declared. Ernst Klaar was arrested by the French police in August 1942 and deported to Auschwitz. Stella chose to accompany him, even though she had not been arrested; they both perished in the death camp.

The three factories provided a limited avenue of access to Ireland for Jewish families fleeing Nazi tyranny. Altogether, about thirty Jewish families came from Europe and settled in the west of Ireland. The factories turned areas of unemployment, emigration and desolation into regions of employment and prosperity. Generations of local men and women found good employment in the ribbon and hat factories and remember with fondness the people they worked for and their times working with them.

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**Frank Schmolka**

My father, Frank Drechsler, came to Ireland from Czechoslovakia in 1939 at the age of 16, with his brother Hanus (18). His mother’s brother, Frank Schmolka, had a hat factory in Chomotow outside Prague, which he left a couple of years earlier to come to Ireland and live in Dublin. He had negotiated with the Irish Trade Board to set up a hat factory in Castlebar and arranged for visas to Ireland for 10 or 12 Jewish relations, some of whom were skilled in the business. Fred and Stefa Schmolka, cousins of my father, also came to Ireland to work in the hat factory and moved later to Dublin as members of the Jewish community.

My grandparents delayed their departure from Czechoslovakia until it was too late, after the Nazi invasion. Since my father heard no more from his parents, he lived with many unanswered questions. Very late in his life he discovered in the records office in Vienna that they had been transported to Terezín and later died in Auschwitz. For this reason I appreciate remembering them at the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration. My mother was Irish and together they had a family of three daughters and one son, of which I am the eldest.

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Anne Drechsler
Dorathea (Dorli) Klepperova was born 16 June 1932 in Chomotow, a German-speaking town in the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia. Her father, Siegfried, was a marketing manager and the family enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle, spending their free time at the Alaun See (the Alum lake), with swimming and leisure facilities in summer and ice-skating in winter.

By 1937 it was clear that the Sudetenland was under threat of being occupied by the Nazis and the Jews of the region were becoming concerned. Dorli’s uncle, while listening to news broadcasts on the radio in 1938, decided that the whole family should pack up and leave for Prague, which they did, immediately. Some months later, the European powers ceded Czechoslovakia to Hitler. Almost as soon as the Germans marched into Chomotow, they destroyed the synagogue. The Germans called the town Komutau.

Dorli’s family realised the urgency of leaving their homeland. Through a visit by an Irish trade mission to Czechoslovakia, seeking to attract European industry to the west of Ireland, Siegfried was aware that a hat factory was being opened in Co Mayo. The trade mission was headed by Senator JE McElinn and included Marcus Witztum and Serge Phillipson, who negotiated the setting up of the hat factory with Hugo Reiniger & Co, hat manufacturer of Chomotow. Siegfried applied for a work permit and, although he had no actual skills in the making of hats, he was granted a visa. Dorli and her parents, Siegfried and Gretel (Margaret), made the long journey by train across Europe to Hollyhead and on to Ireland by boat in the summer of 1939.

They lived in various parts of Dublin for some months before moving to Castlebar when the factory opened. In Ireland, ‘Dorli’ became ‘Doris’. The Kleppers found life in the west of Ireland very different from their previous existence. None of the family spoke English except Gretel, who had learned some at school. However, an attack of scarlet fever before Doris’s birth had rendered Gretel completely deaf, and she had to rely on her ability to lip-read. For Doris it was necessary to learn a third language, too, since all her primary schooling was conducted through Irish. Siegfried or Fred, as he became known, began work in the spinning department of the hat factory. He developed weeping eczema from the oil in the sheep’s wool, which was not helped by the constant dampness of the climate, something unfamiliar to this central European family.

At the age of 12, Doris was sent to boarding school in Dublin. Her parents moved to Dublin in 1952 when Fred’s skin condition made it impossible for him to continue working at the hat factory. The family lived in Clontarf in the north of the city and Fred began a small business importing fancy goods.


Not all of Doris’s family was lucky enough to escape Czechoslovakia. Fred’s two brothers perished in the concentration camps. Despite desperate efforts to get them out of Czechoslovakia, Gretel’s parents, Max and Klara Heller, were sent to Theresienstadt concentration camp north of Prague, in 1942. Eighteen months later they were deported to Auschwitz, where they perished.

Doris attributes the early deaths of her parents – Fred at 62 and Gretel at 63 – to the stress of disruption to the family and to their feeling of helplessness and despair in losing their parents Max and Klara and other close members of the family. They were burdened by the knowledge of their fate and the fates of so many loved ones in the Holocaust.

I have very fond memories of the Alaun See, where I swam in the summer with my cousins, Franceska, Otto and Karli Heller, who went to live in Israel (Palestine) with their parents in 1937. We lived in my grandfather’s house. Downstairs was rented out. My grandparents lived on the first-floor apartment and we lived on the second floor. I was very fond of my grandparents and we were very close. It was very hard saying goodbye to them – even though I did not realise at the time that we would never see each other again.
Irish Places of Refuge

Millisle Farm in Co Down, Northern Ireland

In 1939 the Jewish communities of Belfast, Dublin and Cork leased a 70-acre farm near Millisle on the Ards Peninsula, in Northern Ireland. This farm was to become home to more than three hundred young Jewish refugees from central Europe until its closure in 1948.

The small Jewish community of Belfast responded generously to the needs of the young refugees who ended up in Northern Ireland. A Refugee Aid Committee raised funds from Jewish communities in Belfast, Dublin and Britain, and a Joint Christian Churches Committee was set up. In May 1939, the committee leased the derelict farm in County Down, belonging to Lawrence Gorman. The lease was signed by Barney Hurwitz, President of the Belfast Hebrew Congregation, over a drink at Mooney’s bar in Belfast’s Cornmarket.

The Refugee Settlement Farm, or ‘the Farm’, as it was called, was situated close to the village of Millisle, County Down, on the beautiful Ards Peninsula, about 20 miles from Belfast. Up to 80 people lived and worked on it at any one time. From the first arrivals in May/June 1938 to its closure in 1948, over 300 adults and children passed through Millisle. The refugee children under the age of fourteen attended the local school, learned the language, and worked on the farm. Many continued on to secondary schools, and some joined the British army. Several local people were employed to help the refugees, who were mostly from an urban background.

Many of the young refugees were alone, most were emotionally scarred, and all were displaced. The support and assistance of the adult refugees and the local people contributed to welding this disparate group of young people into a thriving, working farming community, where many remained until it closed three years after the end of the war.

Clonyn Castle, Co Westmeath

Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld, the Executive Director of the Chief Rabbi’s Religious Emergency Council in London, took a personal interest in the rescue of Jewish children from the Polish ghettos both before and after the war. In 1946, he persuaded the owners of the 100-acre estate, Clonyn Castle in Delvin, Co Westmeath, to make the place available as a children’s hostel. The Council asked the Irish Department of Justice to admit 100 Jewish orphans who had survived the concentration camps, on the understanding that the Council would undertake to arrange for the children’s emigration after a specified period. The scheme was not approved by Justice Minister Gerry Boland, and a Department memorandum noted that the minister feared “any substantial increase in our Jewish population might give rise to an anti-Semitic problem”. At the urging of former Chief Rabbi, Isaac Herzog, the Taoiseach Éamon de Valera overruled this decision, and the children were allowed in on condition that there was a guarantee that their stay would only be for a short period.

In May 1948, over 100 orphans arrived from Czechoslovakia and stayed in Clonyn Castle for about 15 months before being moved out of Ireland, as agreed. They settled in the US, Israel and the UK.

In the year 2000, many of the Clonyn Castle children travelled back to attend a reunion in Ireland, where they reminisced about the time they had spent there.
Irish Children of the Holocaust

Geoffrey Phillips

Geoffrey (Günther) Phillips was born in Wanne-Eickel, Germany, in 1925. His father, a veteran of the First World War, was a butcher whose thriving business was ruined by the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses and by discrimination against Jews during the 1930s.

In a town where the Jewish community had been completely integrated, a climate of intimidation and violence began to emerge. In school Jewish children were segregated from their Christian peers; violence against them was common and sometimes even encouraged by the teachers. No matter how clever Jewish students were at school it was ensured that they failed or barely passed their exams. Many teachers actively encouraged physical violence against Jewish students. We always had to walk to school in groups of five or six, because if you were on your own, you might end up getting stones thrown at you or getting a good hiding.

After Kristallnacht (9 November 1938), when there were violent nationwide pogroms against the Jews and their property in Germany and German-controlled lands, the British government was persuaded to accept German, Austrian and Czech child refugees aged from a few months to 17 years to enter Britain on block visas. Funds were raised, guarantors were found. The whole operation was handled by a small, dedicated team of volunteers who worked together – Jews, Christians and especially Quakers. Approximately 10,000 children arrived on special trains via Holland known as Kindertransports, which operated from 2 December 1938 until the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939.

We heard that our synagogue had been set on fire by squads of Hitler Youth and that the same thing was happening all over the country. Before we had recovered from the shock of this terrible news, there was knock on the door. Two plain-clothes policemen asked for my father, told him to pack a change of clothes, and took him away. We heard afterwards that my father had been taken to a concentration camp. A cousin of my father’s was a welfare officer of the Jewish community in a neighbouring town. From her we discovered that Britain was prepared to take in a limited number of young Jewish children. Our cousin urged my mother to register me for the transport.

Carrying only a small suitcase and a bag of provisions, Geoffrey left his family and boarded a Kindertransport train on 15 December 1938. He did not know where he was going. The train took him across the border to Holland and from there a ferry brought him and the other children to Harwich in England. The children were moved around and eventually Geoffrey was able to settle in Bradford. During the war he changed his name to Geoffrey and worked in a textile mill.

As soon as he was old enough, Geoffrey enlisted in the British army. He hoped to be able to find his parents alive and, in July 1943, returned to his home town. His family, however, had already been rounded up and deported to their deaths.

After his military service, Geoffrey returned to Bradford, where he married Phyllis Moore and they had three sons. He moved to Dublin in 1951, where he set up a textile factory. Phyllis passed away in 2006 and Geoffrey still lives in Dublin.

I am here today; I never saw my parents again.

As always, we are honoured to have Holocaust survivors who have made Ireland their home here with us this evening. Their presence reminds us of our solemn duty to make sure that the victims are never forgotten, that the survivors are never abandoned, and that we never allow an event such as the Holocaust to be repeated.

Councillor Vincent Jackson, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2007
From a middle-class Jewish family living in the Czech Sudetenland, Helen Lewis was brought up with a great love of music. At the age of six she went to her first dance class, where she made up her mind that she was going to become a dancer. After finishing school, Helen moved to Prague, where she studied dance and philosophy at the German University.

On completion of her studies Helen became part of a dance company and also taught pupils privately. In the spring of 1938 she married Paul Hermann. The Munich Agreement and the establishment of the ‘Second Republic’, a puppet régime for the German-Nazi administration under President Hácha, did not bode well for Czech Jews. Finally, in early 1939, it was announced that Czechoslovakia had become a protectorate of Nazi Germany. The German army moved in.

Unable to contemplate leaving their family, Helen and her husband Paul remained in Prague as life became more and more difficult for Jews. Soon, transports began to a garrison town north of Prague that had been evacuated – Theresienstadt, known in Czech as Terezín.

Helen and Paul received their summons in August 1942. They were allowed to bring 50 kilogrammes of luggage and spent the night at the local Trade Fair hall with hundreds of other families. They were marched to the railway station at three in the morning and herded onto cattle trucks. Upon arrival at Terezín, Helen was separated from her husband and taken to her new home – a bare-floored barrack room which already housed 30 women.

Helen began work in a children’s home in Terezín, where she tried to provide some instruction for her charges. She was involved in the cultural life of the ghetto, which flourished despite Nazi attempts to suppress it. In conditions of poor hygiene and chronic undernourishment, she also managed to survive surgery for acute appendicitis.

After two years in the ghetto, Helen and Paul were included in one of the transports to the east. They arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944. They both survived selection but Paul was sent on another transport to Germany. He died in Schwarzeide concentration camp in April 1945.

Helen was moved to Stutthof concentration camp and was put to back-breaking work in the snow. In January 1945 the camp was evacuated. The prisoners were force-marched on an endless road for two weeks until they reached an abandoned barn, where they stayed for three days before being marched on again.

Jumping into a ditch, Helen managed to escape the column of marching prisoners. She reached a nearby house and remained there until the Russian army liberated the village. She was eventually able to get to hospital, where she slowly recovered, and eventually returned home.

In 1947 Helen married a friend who had escaped to Northern Ireland before the war and moved with him to Belfast. They had two sons, Michael and Robin. Although no longer able to dance, Helen worked as a choreographer and dance teacher. She still lives in Belfast.

We were escorted by the fiercest and most dreaded SS guards, who shouted their ‘Schneller, schneller!’ as if they wanted to hear the sound of their own voices. The SS women and a few officers travelled ahead in a horse-drawn cart. At night we were herded into an abandoned church, where we slept on the stones. It was very cold and we were terribly tired.

After a few days of wandering on icy roads through hostile villages, we began to realise that we were, in fact, going nowhere; we just kept walking in ever-decreasing circles. If the guards had been rational human beings, they would have run away and saved themselves. But, instead, they stayed with us, faithfully obeying their orders to the last: to hate and torment us and in the end to kill us.

From: A Time to Speak, Helen Lewis (Belfast, 1992)
Inge Radford

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

In 1942 my widowed mother and five brothers, Sigmund, Kurt, Walter, Herbert and Fritz, were deported from Vienna to Minsk in the former USSR.

From evidence given in post-war criminal trials we know what they, with thousands of other Austrian Jews, endured before they were finally shot or gassed. They were initially incarcerated in the Minsk ghetto and then transferred to the labour camp in the village of Maly Trostinec.

Maly Trostinec had no permanent gas chambers but a further contribution to the Nazis’ ‘Final Solution to the Jewish Question’ was made by the use of mobile gas vans. In May 1943, 500 victims were murdered every day in the gas vans which went daily to and from Minsk and Maly Trostinec.

Five of my family were spared the unspeakable ordeal of ghetto living, imprisonment and violent death. At 16, my eldest sister, Elli, went to live with relatives in the USA. My 13- and 14-year-old brothers, Ernst and Erich, went to live on farms in Denmark, and my nine-year-old sister, Rose, and I, aged seven, came to England separately and unbeknown to each other for several years under the auspices of the Jewish Children’s Refugee Organisation.

That we five grew into relatively unscarred and useful citizens was due to many people – Jewish and non-Jewish – whose aim, whether acting from religious or humanitarian motives, was to minimise the trauma of family separation and loss for us and for hundreds of other refugee children. My sister lived happily with a Yorkshire Baptist family until she joined our older sister in America. Again, a local voluntary committee set up in Sevenoaks, Kent – the epitome of ‘middle England’ – raised money to bring me and five other children out of Europe and to guarantee the £50 per child asked for by the British government, who had arranged the mechanics of our escape.

Homes and hearts were opened to us. Many children like myself stayed with our ‘adopting’ families through school, university, marriage and parenthood. For me, these new, kind and loving relationships blurred the picture of a small, smiling woman surrounded by several boys all waving as the train pulled out of Vienna station.

Suzi Diamond

Suszi (Suzi) Molnar was born in Debrecin, near Budapest, in Hungary. In April 1945, she was found with her brother, Tibor (Terry), in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp by the British liberators. She was two years old and her brother was five.

Suzi’s father had been taken away by the Nazis. Suzi, her mother and her brother were rounded up and forced into cattle trucks. They were sent first to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women and children, and then on to Bergen-Belsen. During the journey the three huddled together, their mother attempting to shield them from the overcrowding and squalor. On arrival at Bergen-Belsen, the two-year-old was washed down with a fire hose.

Suzi remembers her mother giving her and Terry almost all of her own rations. Eventually her mother became so weak that she was moved to another hut; she did not return, and died of typhoid shortly after the arrival of the British.

When the camp was liberated, Suzi herself was ill with typhus. The army established a makeshift hospital for the thousands of ailing survivors. An Irish volunteer paediatrician, Bob Collis, working with the Red Cross, befriended some of the orphaned children, and eventually brought them home to Ireland.

Suzi and Terry recovered their physical health and Bob Collis arranged for them to be adopted by an Orthodox Jewish couple, Elsie and Willie Samuels, in Dublin.

Like many Holocaust survivors, for Suzi the emotional damage has outlasted the physical. According to the prevailing attitude at the time of her youth, traumatic experiences were suppressed in the hope that they would be forgotten. Suzi buried her concentration-camp experience. However, she still lives with a fear of water, an utter abhorrence of dirt and a mistrust of all that is unfamiliar. Also, like many other survivors, she was unable to speak about Bergen-Belsen until fifty years after leaving it behind.

Suzi is married to Alec Diamond and she has spent her life in Dublin. They have two grown-up children, Bernard and Lynette. Terry passed away in London in January 2007.

I remember the long, oblong-shaped carriage. My mother went over to one of the corners; there were no seats, only wooden floors, and the three of us huddled together.
Born in 1932 in Biłgoraj, eastern Poland, Jan Kaminski was seven years old when the Nazis invaded his country. He was the second eldest of a Jewish family of two boys and two girls. When the Germans raided the city centre in pursuit of its Jewish population, Jan watched them herd those they caught into a park, its perimeter fenced with barbed wire. From a raised balcony, troops fired into the dense crowd below. In terror, Jan ran from the town, leaving his family behind.

From then on, the seven-year-old Jan adopted a non-Jewish identity, which he would retain for the greater part of his life. He worked on small farms in return for room and board, moving on whenever he felt that anyone suspected he was a Jew. Eventually, Jan was caught along with the farming family he was staying with. He was forced to join a group of Polish children, who were being deported to the west in order to make *lebensraum* (living space) for ethnic Germans. He found himself in a transit camp at Zwierzyniec.

Jan managed to survive a little better than most of his fellow prisoners by delivering food slipped through the fences by generous peasants on the outside, and usually receiving a morsel in return. He was finally put on a transport to Germany but once again, he escaped, aided somewhat by the Polish resistance.

Taken in by a tailor, he lived with the family and was apprenticed in that trade. Some time later in 1941, a group of boys at a youth holiday camp discovered that Jan was Jewish. They left one boy to guard him while the others went to inform the German guards. This boy took pity on the young Jan and gave him the chance to run.

Once again Jan found himself wandering from farm to farm, doing odd jobs in order to survive. By 1944 he had made his way to Lublin, into which the Allied forces were advancing. Spotting a unit of Polish soldiers attached to the Russian army, Jan begged them to take him on, which they did. He became the mascot of the 21st Artillery Regiment of the Polish army. He accompanied that regiment to the Czech–German border, where he joined another unit on its way to Murnau in south-eastern Germany. By this time the war had ended and the United Nations had set up a school in the camp. Jan began his education there at the age of thirteen.

With soldiers of the British army’s Polish Corps, Jan travelled to Porto San Giorgio, Italy, en route to England. There he began to make some money by trading and was able to start saving. When he finally arrived in Britain Jan trained in the navy college at Petworth, West Sussex, but soon became restless and used the money he had saved to go to London.

Zofia Sarnowska, the manager of the Polish YMCA in Sloane Square, took an interest in Jan and decided to sponsor his education. He learned English in London, then studied in Surrey and in Edinburgh. Returning to London, he found another guardian in the guise of the Chancellor of the Dutch embassy, van Karnebeek. Again Jan was persuaded to continue his education. He passed his GCE exams in seven subjects at the Regent Street Polytechnic. Through a Catholic agency called Veritas, he obtained a scholarship in 1954 to study in Ireland at Cork University. Jan found that most of his friends were in Trinity College, Dublin, so he took the entrance exam and transferred to Trinity, where he studied Economics and Politics. When he graduated at the end of the 1950s, he was granted an Irish passport.

He went to work in the nascent computer industry, with the company ICT, for several years. His long and diverse business career has also included owning a restaurant, a night club, a travel business and hotel and property development in Ireland, Poland and Spain.

Jan lives in Clonskeagh in Dublin and remains keenly aware of his Polish and Jewish roots. He retired in 2006 but is still active in the Polish community in Ireland.
When Hitler came to power in 1933, Rosel Siev was 12 years old. A sensitive and emotional child, she was deeply affected by the antisemitic oppression that followed in her native Germany. After the horror of Kristallnacht in 1938, Rosel’s parents decided to send her away to Britain. She arrived in Cardiff, where she stayed with friends, then made her way to Manchester. When war broke out she was unable to return to Germany and she trained as a nurse. Like so many others at the time, Rosel was officially considered an ‘enemy alien’.

The only contact with her family during this time was a Red Cross letter from her mother, reading: We are on our way. Don’t forget us. Rosel’s mother was on her way to a ghetto in Weimar, near the Polish border, before being deported to Auschwitz. She and Rosel’s two young brothers were murdered in Auschwitz. Her father had already died of pneumonia in Dachau.

One of Rosel’s sisters, Laura, was saved by Oskar Schindler. She survived seven concentration camps and was emotionally and physically ravaged by the experience. After liberation she married a fellow prisoner, who had helped save her life by surreptitiously handing her crusts of bread.

Another sister, Hilda, was on board the Patria, a ship carrying hundreds of illegal refugees to Palestine. For nine months it remained off the Palestinian coast, the British authorities preventing it from entering harbour. The refugees were due to be deported to Mauritius but, in order to destabilise the ship, Zionist paramilitaries planted a bomb on board. They miscalculated its effects, however, and the ship sank with the loss of over 250 lives. Hilda managed to survive and swim across Haifa harbour. She reached land and was helped to safety by the man whom she eventually married.

After the war, Rosel married Arthur Goldstein, with whom she had two children, Carolyn and Sharon. After her husband’s death she married again, to a widowed Irish solicitor, Stanley Siev, and became stepmother to his four young children. She now lives in the Rathgar area of Dublin.

It is impossible to expect any young person to fully understand the terrible times I and hundreds of thousands of others had to live through. Deprived of my entire family – 63 persons in all, who perished in the concentration camps between 1941 and 1945 – and deprived of my youth, I went to England at the age of 17 to get out of Germany and visit friends of the family. With the outbreak of the Second World War, I was trapped in England and at that time I had the feeling that I would never see my parents again. That proved to be the case. After the war, an American soldier, who was involved in the massive rescue operation from the camps, came across one of my sisters, Laura, who had gone through seven different concentration camps and had survived.

She told him that she had a sister who was somewhere in England and, with the help of the Jewish Refugee Committee they succeeded in finding me in a hospital in Manchester, where I had become a fully qualified nurse. Consequently, my sister, Laura, who was in a rehabilitation camp in Germany, was reunited with me again. It was the saddest day of my life when I was told that my dear parents, siblings, grandparents and so many of my family had perished in the camps.

I have had much time to think about what has happened, but to rationalise this terrible tragedy is an impossibility. However, I will never cease to believe in God, who has now richly rewarded me with beloved children, many adorable grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who have brought great pleasure into my life.

One of the lessons is that although Hitler and the Nazis were determined to extinguish Jews and Judaism from the world stage, Hitler and his cohorts have been wiped out, whilst the Jews and Judaism are becoming stronger.
Tomi Reichental was born on a small farm in Piestany, Czechoslovakia, in 1935, the year of the anti-Jewish Nuremberg laws. The Slovak government was a puppet administration of the Germany Nazi party and actively aided Nazi policies. As young children, Tomi and his brother, Miki, had to wear a yellow star of David on their clothing. Going to school they suffered bullying, taunts, assaults and humiliation from their peers, simply for being Jewish. Eventually, Jews were no longer allowed in the school.

When an SS unit stormed the village, Tomi’s father was taken away and bundled onto a cattle truck bound for Auschwitz. He managed to escape by jumping from the moving vehicle with another man. He then joined the local resistance and fought with the partisans during the war.

In November 1944, despite having false papers, Tomi was arrested along with his mother Judith, brother Miki, grandmother Roselle, aunt Margot and cousin Eva. They were deported to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northern Germany.

In his ‘new home in hell’, each morning Tomi faced roll call in the freezing cold. He would become inured to the stench of the rotting corpses piled high around the camp, eventually playing among them, taking care to keep out of the way of the Nazis who practised their marksmanship on human targets. He watched as hundreds of people around him fell ill and died from typhus, diphtheria, tuberculosis or from starvation. Tomi credits his survival to the fact that he was one of the group the Germans showed the outside world as proof that the prisoners were well cared for. He was given extra rations before being displayed to outsiders.

One day in April 1945 the German guards disappeared from the camp and another group of soldiers, with movie cameras and food rations, arrived. The camp had been liberated. Many people, whose stomachs had shrunk from months or years of malnutrition, were unable to tolerate the protein-rich army rations and died. Despite the Allies’ best efforts the deaths continued for some months.

Tomi’s grandmother passed away in Bergen-Belsen. Tomi, his mother, brother, aunt and cousin Eva survived. Tomi lost 35 close family members in the Holocaust. He came to Ireland in 1960 and has lived here ever since.

In 2007 Tomi returned to Bergen-Belsen for the first time in 63 years as part of a documentary being made about him called *Until the Tenth Generation*. He and his brother, Miki, and cousin, Eva, attended the opening of the Bergen-Belsen Museum and laid a memorial plaque there for their grandmother.

We arrive at the site and walk slowly up to an open area with forest all around us. It is now a peaceful, tranquil place but for me, 63 years too late! When I arrived in 1944 it was ‘hell on earth’. This open area represented an open graveyard. The memories flood my mind – back then there were corpses lying all around as far as the eye could see. The enormity of this place hits us when we pass the mounds of earth which are the mass graves containing thousands of corpses. Each one has a concrete plaque stating the number buried within: 2,500, 1,000 and on and on. It is, in fact, one of the largest cemeteries in Europe. There are over 70,000 murdered victims buried within these mass graves: 20,000 POWs and 50,000 Jews. We stopped at the Jewish memorial monument, where Kaddish was recited for the thousands of murdered Jews who had perished in this place. It was the most emotional experience for all of us.

A documentary about Tomi called “Until the Tenth Generation” was premiered at the Cork Film Festival in October 2008 and a television version called “The Boy from Belsen” shown on RTE 1 in January 2009.
Zoltan Zinn-Collis

Zoltan Zinn-Collis thinks he was born on 1 August 1940, although he is not certain of the date, in Kežmarok, Czechoslovakia. During the Nazis’ last purge of the Slovak Jews, Zoltan’s mother, a Hungarian Protestant, was given the chance to renounce her marriage to her Jewish husband. She refused and the whole family was rounded up and deported.

They were forced onto cattle trucks – Zoltan’s father in one compartment with the other men, the rest of the family in another – and transported to the concentration camp at Ravensbrück, Germany. On arrival, Zoltan’s father was sent to his death. The rest of the family was taken further west to Bergen-Belsen. Zoltan’s younger sister did not survive the journey.

When the British army liberated Bergen-Belsen in April 1945, Zoltan had been there for several months. The camp’s conditions by that time were extremely squalid; starvation and disease were rife. Zoltan had contracted tuberculosis of the spine. His mother, ill with typhoid, lost her life on the very day the British army entered the camp. Shortly after the liberation, Zoltan’s older brother Aladar also succumbed to the disease.

In the makeshift hospital constructed by the British army, Zoltan and his sister, Edit, began to regain their health. They became the favourites of an Irish Red Cross doctor, Bob Collis, who promised to take them home with him to Ireland. After a year’s recuperation in Sweden, Zoltan and Edit, along with four other orphaned children – Suszi and Tibor Molnar, Evelyn Schwartz, and Franz Berlin – arrived with Bob Collis in Dublin. The children spent some more time in convalescence at Fairy Hill Hospital, Howth, north of Dublin. The tuberculosis, however, caused severe damage to Zoltan’s spine and he never fully recovered.

Collis incorporated Zoltan and Edit into his own family and the Zinn children added the suffix “Collis” to their name. Living with the Collises, their time was divided between Bob’s house in Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, and a country home in the Wicklow Mountains. Zoltan stayed in Ireland and spent his professional life working as a chef. He is married to Joan and lives in Co Wicklow. Zoltan’s family perished in the Holocaust. He is acutely aware of not having any relatives representing the family at occasions such as weddings, anniversaries, and other family events.

When they brought my father back to us we were all in the good room again – Mother, a coven of aunts, Uncle Peter, and Granny, of course. It was the same German commandant who had visited us before, and he was with one other guardist. My father was beaten and bloodied, limping painfully. When they dragged him in everyone gasped, and some of the aunts began to weep. Even though I was only four, I could see that there was deep pain in his eyes, which must have been both physical and mental.

The commandant no longer made any pretence at civility towards my mother. He became a beast, swearing and shouting at her and striking my father again. Whether or not this was for show, in front of the audience of his colleague and the assembled family, I do not know, but at that time it really did not matter to us. Aladar and I started to howl, and Edit tried desperately to hide behind Granny’s skirts.

Coldly, they told my mother what was happening. They had come to take us away. They ordered my mother to pack one bag for us all, which would be all we were allowed to bring. She did so and was back down in a few minutes. There were some very quick goodbyes. Then, my father made an effort to take charge. He tried to straighten his back, pick up the bag and lead his wife and frightened, shivering children out the door after the commandant. He was head of the family after all and, realising that he could not change what was to happen, he wanted to stand and be counted. I am proud of that memory. There were some good things that happened, even in this jumble of horrors.

However, with the beating he had received, he was not strong enough to carry the case. It fell to the ground and remained there – and as it fell, he winced with pain and shame. It is of little matter, though, that my father failed to lead us out of our house. The important thing to me is that he had mettle enough to make the attempt.

From Final Witness: My Journey from the Holocaust to Ireland, Zoltan Zinn-Collis with Alicia McAuley, Dublin, 2006

Irish Children of the Holocaust
Edith and Kurt Sekules

Edith Mendel was born in 1916, halfway through the Great War. Her parents were part of Vienna’s middle-class Jewish community, which was an integral part of the liberal and pluralist population of the city.

Edith found ample nourishment in 1920s and 1930s Vienna for her love of classical music and literature. Despite the political tensions of the late 1920s and early 1930s, she frequented the city’s opera and musical recitals.

Problems in her father’s motor business forced Edith to abandon her studies and enter the catering industry to help provide for the family. During her training she met Kurt Sekules, a radio technician, and they fell in love. In 1936, amid news of horrific antisemitism in Germany and growing fears that the Nazis would invade Austria, they married.

Two years later, Hitler did indeed march in triumph through the streets of Vienna. Edith soon lost her job at the prestigious Hotel Bristol and Kurt was also dismissed. The same anti-Semitic measures prevailing in Germany were instituted in Austria; the Nazis called it their ‘great spring-cleaning’. Into this ominous climate Edith and Kurt’s first child, Ruth, was born in May 1938.

The young Sekules family, like many of Vienna’s Jews, resolved to leave the country as soon as they could. Edith’s younger sister Lottchen, known as Lotte, left for London having managed to find a job in domestic service. After receiving encouraging replies to Kurt’s application for work in Estonia, he, Edith and their baby daughter boarded a plane for Tallinn on 28 September 1938, the same day that Chamberlain left England for the Munich Conference.

With much support from the local Jewish community, Kurt found work in Estonia and the family found lodgings. They were able to keep in touch with their family in Vienna and Edith found out that her mother had managed to follow Lotte to England, where she, too, had found work as a domestic and cook. Her father and grandmother, however, were forced to remain in Vienna, in the ever-worsening conditions for Jews. They both died the following year.

Edith and Kurt applied to emigrate to Australia and in 1939 their applications were approved. However, because they were German nationals when war broke out, their permits were automatically cancelled. In June 1940 Estonia became part of the USSR and, when Hitler attacked Russia, the Sekules family became enemy aliens. It was not long before they were arrested by the secret police.

They were taken in cattle trucks to Harku, a detention camp near Tallinn. A great many of their fellow travellers were Jewish refugees like themselves, arrested because of their German passports.

They were shunted eastward from camp to camp ahead of the advancing Nazi army, each time in crowded cattle trucks, vulnerable to attack from the air. Although conditions were nothing like the horror of the Nazi concentration camps, rations were basic, space was minimal and the work by which prisoners could earn extra food was arduous. The worst hardships, however, were caused by the extremity of the arctic winters. Many prisoners did not survive them.

During the winter of 1944 Edith suffered a miscarriage and had to undergo an operation. She endured the operation without any anaesthetic, because none was available. After it was completed she was allowed a 15-minute rest and instructed to walk the half-hour journey back to the camp alone.

The war eventually came to an end, but the prisoners were not released. Returning Russian soldiers were given priority on the railway lines and Edith and Kurt did not commence their tortuous journey home until January 1947. By then they had three young children.

The economic conditions in post-war Austria were hard, and the Sekules family decided to move to Northern Ireland, where Kurt’s parents had escaped before the war. They travelled via London, where Edith was reunited with Lotte and her mother. Until a letter from the Kok Uzek camp in Kazakhstan made its way to London after the war, Edith’s mother had assumed that Edith and Kurt had fallen victim to the Nazis. She had had trees planted in Israel in their memory, which Edith was able to visit some years later.

With encouragement from a family friend, Edith was persuaded to start a knitting business, a venture which was welcomed in Northern Ireland. She found suitable premises in Kilkeel, a fishing village in County Down, and bought several knitting machines. The business became successful and eventually supplied knitwear to clients all over the world. It is still in operation.

With all my experience of camp life to that point, I concluded that the hardest part of being a prisoner was not the loss of freedom or being forced to be in a group all the time but the fact that all decisions were made for you by someone else and without any prior warning. This depersonalised you through being stripped of any freedom of choice. It was all-embracing – when, how and where to travel or go; how to be housed; when, what and where to work; when to get up and when to go to sleep. These are all assumed as automatic choices when you are free; in camp all choice is abruptly withdrawn from you.

From Edith Sekules, Surviving the Nazis, Exile and Siberia (London, 2000).
Scholar, teacher, writer, and traveller, Hubert Marshall Butler was an Anglo-Irish Protestant born in Kilkenny in 1900. He passionately encouraged pluralism in Ireland, and was one of those rare individuals who really made a difference. Butler has often been described as “Ireland’s moral conscience”.

In the spring of 1938, Butler read a newspaper report of a protest meeting in the Mansion House, London, discussing the plight of European Jewry. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of “the systematic persecution without parallel even in the Middle Ages and the incredible mental and moral torture” to which Jews in Germany were being subjected. Subsequently, Butler went to work with The Religious Society of Friends at the Quaker International Centre in Vienna.

Butler worked closely with Emma Cadbury in the Vienna Centre, processing the paperwork of Jews and others desperate to obtain exit visas. Between 1928 and 1939, the Vienna Centre handled over 11,000 applications affecting 15,000 people. The centre managed to help over 4,500 people settle in other countries. During Butler’s time at the Quaker International Centre, he and his colleagues helped 2,408 Jews leave Austria.

Soon after he arrived in Vienna, in July 1938, Butler attended the Évian Conference on Refugees. There, he discovered that no country was prepared to offer a safe haven for Jewish or other refugees from Nazism. Butler returned to Vienna furious and disheartened. In Stemming the Dark Tide, Sheila Spielhofer gives an insight into the huge task facing the Vienna Centre: Faced with apparently insoluble problems and living in a country where hatred, intolerance and violence seemed to triumph, the workers at the Centre as well as the Vienna Group were in danger of falling into a state of despondency and inertia.

At the Centre, Butler helped set up The Kagran Gruppe (group), an agricultural co-operative of Viennese Jews and people whose Jewish connections were only partial, such as a Jewish spouse or grandparent, who had banded together for collective emigration.

Every morning, the members of the group took the long tram journey to Kagran, a suburb on the banks of the Danube. There they worked under the supervision of Gestapo guards, who were amused at the sight of middle-class Jews, including elderly people and children, who had never held a shovel before, toiling at heavy manual labour.

Meanwhile, Butler and his colleagues tried desperately to get entry permits for the Kagran Group as migrant workers to Peru, Bolivia, Rhodesia, Colombia, Canada, England and Ireland. The Kagran Group became a vehicle by which approximately 150 people obtained exit permits from Austria. Ultimately, very few members of the Kagran Group actually settled in Ireland. Most of them put down roots and remained in Britain.

Butler was instrumental in creating the Irish Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees. This was a cross-section of highly
regarded Irishmen from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions working together. They attempted to secure temporary settlement for refugees in Ireland.

In 1988, Butler published *The Children of Drancy*, the title of which was inspired by the infamous transit camp outside Paris from which thousands of French Jewish children and adults were packed into cattle trucks in the summer of 1942 and deported to Auschwitz.

Butler often reflected on the way people react to evil. In *The Children of Drancy*, he writes: 

"Hitler brought into the world misery such as no man had previously conceived possible. It had to be combated. The British were slow to observe this. The Irish never did."

Information about the Holocaust reached Ireland during the war years, and the Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine (and former Chief Rabbi of Ireland), Isaac Herzog, sent telegrams throughout the war to Éamon de Valera, expressing the urgent need to take in refugees. But, as Butler had noted, the mood in Ireland was one of ignorance and indifference.

After the war, Butler’s concern for injustices towards others prompted him to investigate the wartime genocide conducted by the viciously anti-Serb Orthodox Christian and antisemitic Ustaše regime in Croatia. In particular, he highlighted the case of Andrija Artukovic, the former Croat Minister of the Interior, whom the Yugoslavs were trying to have extradited from the US for war crimes. Like so many other former members of the Nazi-sympathising Croatian government, Artukovic was helped to escape by powerful interests, including Roman Catholic clergy. In documents shown to him in New York, Butler discovered that Artukovic had also spent time in Ireland in 1947.

During a public meeting in Dublin in 1952, Butler’s denunciation of the ecclesiastical role in the Ustaše genocide led to a walkout by the Papal Nuncio. Butler and his family were ostracised, and he was forced to resign from the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, which he had founded. At the Butler centenary in October 2000, the mayor of Kilkenny finally apologised publicly for the failure to acknowledge Butler’s account of the truth, all those years earlier.

In his long life of 91 years, Hubert Marshall Butler was a staunch advocate of truth and justice. He became champion of many who had suffered injustices, and will be remembered as a great humanitarian.

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**We in Ireland have not been immune to bigotry and the indifference which manifested itself in Europe this century.**

**Ireland’s doors were not freely open to those families and individuals fleeing from persecution and death.**

**Some people did find refuge and comfort in Ireland, but their numbers were not very great.**

**We must acknowledge the consequences of this indifference.**

* Taoiseach John Bruton, Holocaust Commemoration Ceremony, Terenure Synagogue, 26 April 1995*
As volunteers with the British Red Cross immediately after the war, Bob Collis and Han Hogerzeil tended to hundreds of young children who had survived Bergen-Belsen. They brought six of these children back with them to Ireland.

Towards the end of the war, Dr Bob Collis, a paediatrician at Dublin’s Rotunda Hospital, joined the British Red Cross and St John’s Ambulance Brigade together with Irish medical colleagues Patrick MacClancy and Nigel Kinnear. Their goal was to reach continental Europe and give service to war victims. When they heard eyewitness accounts about the conditions in Bergen-Belsen, Bob Collis and his colleagues immediately volunteered their help. They were joined by a Dutchwoman, Han Hogerzeil, a lawyer who spoke five languages and who, together with her mother, had helped to run a safe house for Jews during the war. Han’s family lost everything, including the family home, at the Battle of Arnhem.

When British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen on 15 April 1945, they found more than 50,000 human beings alive under appalling conditions. The stench of death could be detected from 15 miles away.

Belsen itself was not an extermination centre but had originally been intended as a POW and a transit camp. Inmates perished in their thousands from starvation and disease. Their malnutrition was exacerbated by an epidemic of typhoid fever, carried by lice, and which spread like wildfire. 14,000 prisoners died in the first few days after liberation, and similar numbers perished in the following weeks.

One of the blocks that Bob took on in the camp contained over five hundred orphan children recovering from malnutrition. Another block was transformed into a children’s hospital. Han’s knowledge of languages was invaluable; the children were of nine different nationalities.

Six of the children in the hospital – Zoltan and Edit Zinn, Tibor (Terry) and Suszi (Suzi) Molnar, Evelyn Schwarz and Franz Berlin – became Bob’s ‘special charges’. Zoltan and Edit Zinn were of Slovak origin. Two of their siblings had not survived – their baby sister died in the cattle car on the way to the camps, and their brother, Aladar, died immediately after liberation, as did their mother. Bob and Han managed to nurse Zoltan through tubercular pleurisy and critical complications.

Tibor and Suszi Molnar came from a cultured Jewish-Hungarian background. All of their family had been murdered by the Nazis and their mother, Gisella, died in Belsen immediately after liberation. Evelyn Schwartz was a little German-Jewish girl, and Franz Berlin was so called because he had been picked up unconscious in the street in Berlin and brought to the hospital in Belsen.

After many of the children in the camp had been restored to health, they were repatriated to their different countries. The Swedish government invited hundreds of the remaining orphans to Sweden, where they could recuperate further. Since nobody appeared to claim ‘Bob’s children’, he eventually brought them home to Ireland. They stayed in Fairy Hill, a beautiful open-air hospital on the Hill of Howth near Dublin for some months for further convalescence. Bob and his wife made Zoltan and Edit part of their own family and the children added ‘Collis’ to their own names. Bob arranged the first formal adoption in Ireland when he organized for Tibor (Terry) and Suzi Molnar to be adopted by a Dublin Jewish couple, Willie and Elsie Samuels. Evelyn Schwartz was also adopted by a Dublin couple who later moved to Australia.

Han went on to a distinguished humanitarian career in refugee resettlement work. She served at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and later at the Inter-Governmental Commission for Refugees in London. She later studied medicine at King’s College Hospital in
London, and did her internship at the Jewish Hospital in the East End of London.

Bob and Han eventually married. They were two matched spirits who met through the hell of Belsen and devoted their entire lives to the well-being of children of all religions and cultures. They later worked with Han’s brother, Dr Lykle Hogerzeil, at his leprosy mission in India. Wherever they worked and lived, they stayed in touch with their ‘Belsen children’ who all thrived, and whose children and grandchildren can be found throughout the world.

Now commenced perhaps the most extraordinary liberation in the history of the world.

The British troops who first came in were chiefly hygiene men. They started at once the Augean task of cleaning up the place. For the first two days they were almost alone and had to leave the SS guards around to prevent the typhus patients from getting out and starting an epidemic. Then more troops arrived, and the now famous 32 Casualty Clearing Station came in under Lieut-Colonel Johnston, who took over the medical command. The SS were rapidly got under control. The enraged British private soldiers who saw the pitiable corpses and the more pitiable sick, starved and dying, turned with rage and contempt on the murderers, and beat them up. They made them bury the dead at the double. They fed them on the rations the SS had given their prisoners. Then gradually the English rage subsided. Staff officers removed the remaining SS men for imprisonment and questioning. Some of these were already incubating typhus, caught from lice when burying the dead. When the fever came out they were not treated as patients but rather as they had treated others heretofore.

From Straight On, Robert Collis and Han Hogerzeil (London, 1947)

Righteous Among the Nations – per Country & Ethnic Origin 1 January, 2008

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
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TOTAL PERSONS 22,216

* The Danish Underground requested that all its members who participated in the rescue of the Jewish community not be listed individually, but commemorated as one group.

** Includes two persons originally from Indonesia, but residing in the Netherlands.

The number of Righteous Among the Nations continues to grow – people who risked their own lives to save Jews during the Nazi Holocaust. They come from all strata of society and from different backgrounds, ages, religions and ethnic groups. They were individuals, diplomats, families, groups of friends or members of organisations. Some were whole nations such as Denmark and Bulgaria who saved their Jewish communities and several thousands of Jews, whereas others saved just one. All, however, were united in their desire to help their fellow human beings. According to Jewish tradition: “Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world.”
During the years of the Nazi regime, good men and women from all walks of life in many countries did something to prevent the triumph of evil.

At Ireland’s first Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in January 2003, the role played by Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg and Peter Bielenberg in the 1944 July Plot to assassinate Hitler was publicly acknowledged for the first time. If the plot had succeeded, the war might have been shortened, the slaughter ended, and the lives of millions of Jews saved.

Like many of his class, von der Schulenburg initially joined the Nazi party, but by 1939 he was part of the military opposition to Hitler. Hiding behind the cover of his military career, he participated in the failed plot to kill Hitler during the victory parade in Paris in June 1940. In the July Plot of 1944, the plotters intended to make von der Schulenburg State Secretary in the Reich Ministry of the Interior. When the plot failed, he was arrested. He appeared before the “People’s Court” in Berlin on 10 August 1944, was condemned to death, and was hanged that afternoon. In the court he said he did not regret what he had done, and that future generations would understand.

Peter Bielenberg was a young German lawyer married to Anglo-Irish Christabel Burton (named after the suffragette Christabel Pankhurst). She was a music student in Hamburg who had sung with John McCormack. Peter and Christabel moved to Germany after their marriage in 1934. Because Peter refused to join the Nazi party, he could not practise law, so he volunteered for the army. He and Christabel were so appalled by Kristallnacht in 1938 that they decided to settle in Ireland. An anti-Nazi friend, Adam von Trott zu Solz, convinced Peter that it was his patriotic duty to stay in Germany and fight Nazism. Peter and Christabel continued to associate with anti-Nazi circles.

Von Trott and several of the other July plotters were tried and hanged from meat hooks. Peter was arrested by the Gestapo. Pulling strings with Nazi acquaintances, Christabel visited Peter. He managed to plant in her palm a matchbox that carried a message outlining the story he had told his interrogators about his involvement with the plotters. Armed with Peter’s alibis, and with typical effrontery, Christabel turned up at Gestapo headquarters, demanding to be interrogated. Angered by the treatment of another interviewee, she famously told her interrogator
to switch off the lights. Playing up her Irish roots (her mother was from Corofin) and her family links with the press baron, Lord Rothermere, who at one time had been sympathetic to the Nazis, she bluffed her way through the interview, using Peter’s concocted stories. Peter was released to an army punishment camp, but slipped away and was reunited with his family in the Black Forest.

In 1948, Peter and Christabel settled on a farm near Tullow in County Carlow with their three children. Two of the Bielenberg sons married two of von Schulenburg’s daughters. Christabel’s autobiography, The Past Is Myself, was published in 1968, translated into seven languages, and was later turned into a BBC drama. Christabel helped to set up a fund for the families of the Resistance to Hitler, and routinely confronted Holocaust deniers such as David Irving. Peter and Christabel lived the rest of their lives in Ireland. Peter died in 2000, followed two years later by Christabel, who died in November 2003.

Sister Paula

Von der Schulenburg’s artist sister, Tisa (Elisabeth), was a confirmed anti-Fascist who shocked her family by marrying a Berlin Jew in 1928. The couple fled to England in 1933, where Tisa joined the anti-Fascist Artists’ International Association. Later, she worked as an artist with the Durham coal miners. She attended her father’s funeral in Germany in 1938, causing her to be refused re-entry at Croydon airport. Hated by the Nazis because she was a communist, Tisa was barred by the British for being a Nazi! She spent the war years in Germany, and it was at her home that her brother, Fritz-Dietlof, first met von Stauffenberg, the one-armed officer who placed the suitcase bomb in Hitler’s lair.

After the war, Tisa became a nun in an Ursuline convent in Westphalia, taking the name Sister Paula. Here she spent the rest of her life, producing some of her most powerful work. She addressed the horrors of the Holocaust in a series of harrowing prints and bronze reliefs for the Jewish museum established by the Ursuline nuns in the small town of Dorsten.
Denis Johnston

William Denis Johnston was born in 1901, the only child of William, a barrister, and Kathleen, a former operatic soprano. Denis grew up in the elegant Dublin suburb of Ballsbridge. The family had Ulster-Scots roots, and would spend holidays in Belfast, the north-coast resorts of Portrush and Portstewart, or the Scottish islands.

Denis penned his first play at the age of eight. His school education involved the Misses Wilson’s German High School in Ballsbridge, St Andrew’s College on St Stephen’s Green and Merchiston Castle, a boarding school in Edinburgh.

On leaving school, Johnston had decided to become a barrister or a member of parliament. He won a place at Cambridge, where he studied History and Law at Christ’s College. On graduating, he spent a year at the Harvard Law School, where he also studied Literature. In May 1925 he passed the Bar exams in Dublin and London.

Johnston became increasingly interested in the theatre, and wrote a play called ‘Shadowdance’. He tried unsuccessfully to have it staged at the Abbey Theatre but, revised as The Old Lady Says ‘No!’, it was produced in the Gate Theatre to great acclaim. Johnston went on to write several other notable plays, including The Moon in the Yellow River and A Bride for the Unicorn.

In October 1936 Johnston got a job with the BBC in Belfast, finally ending his legal career. He was a feature programme research assistant and as such wrote and rewrote scripts and radio plays. He moved to London in 1938 and began writing and directing television programmes. When war broke out in 1939 and the television service was suspended, he took a job with the BBC’s American Liaison Department, where he censored communication between American broadcasters operating in London and their contacts in the US. He was sent back to Belfast with a nominal role as war correspondent, where he was able to bridge the gap between BBC politics and Irish neutrality. Neutrality was for Johnston a natural position, and he was wary of being expected to produce propaganda.

His role as war correspondent became real when Belfast was bombed in the spring of 1941. The BBC were keen to retain his role in the ‘theatre of war’, and soon Johnston was on his way to north Africa. After spending some time in Cairo, he moved to Palestine and in autumn 1942 was in Jerusalem reporting on the Battle of El Alamein, the decisive battle of the desert war.

His third assignment, in late 1944, took him to the newly liberated city of Paris as well as to other parts of France, to Belgium, across the border into Germany and back. By then rumours of concentration camps were beginning to emerge. Johnston was sceptical of what he was told.

As a correspondent he was invited by the Americans to visit the recently liberated concentration camp at Buchenwald. As he approached the camp, he found a trickle, then a stream, of Displaced Persons, as the liberated internees were called. Past the gate, above which hung a large black flag, two Channel Islanders showed him the camp crematorium and blood-stained cellar. They told him how there had been 70,000 inmates who were forced to work for sixteen hours per day, and how the SS had called for reinforcements who would machine-gun the prisoners to death before the Allies arrived. Fortunately, the Allies had got there first. Johnston was forced to abandon his previous incredulity about the camps and to acknowledge them as an offence against the human race – an attempt to de-humanise the species. He concluded that those who are capable of such things will have to be killed themselves. There is no other solution.

Johnston resigned from the BBC in 1947 to concentrate on his career as a writer. He was honoured for his work with the BBC and went on to further success as a playwright and teacher. In Nine Rivers to Jordan, the work produced from
his wartime diaries, Johnston gives one of the definitive eyewitness accounts on entering Buchenwald:

‘Here’s the block we want you to see,’ said Quick. ‘Don’t come in if you don’t want to.’

I went in. At one end lay a heap of smoking clothes amongst which a few ghouls picked and searched – for what, God only knows. As we entered the long hut the stench hit us in the face, and a queer wailing came to our ears. Along both sides of the shed was tier upon tier of what can only be described as shelves. And lying on these, packed tightly side by side, like knives and forks in a drawer, were living creatures – some of them stirring, some of them stiff and silent, but all of them skeletons, with the skin drawn tight over their bones, with heads bulging and misshapen from emaciation, with burning eyes and sagging jaws. And as we came in, those with the strength to do so turned their heads and gazed at us; and from their lips came that thin, unearthly noise.

Then I realised what it was. It was meant to be cheering. They were cheering the American uniform that I wore.

We walked the length of the shed – and then through another one. From the shelves feeble arms rose and waved, like twigs in a breeze. Most of them were branded with numbers.

– Hoch – Hoch – Viva – Viva!

How horrible that this should be the place that I have been seeking all these years. I thought that it was Eckartsberga, but it seems that it was Buchenwald. And now, on this terrible, this unforgettable day I have found it.


We are gathered here this evening to pay homage to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, and to honour those who stood against it. Only by remembering the horrors that man is capable of inflicting on man will we truly learn the lessons for today as we strive to eradicate the scourge of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance from our midst.

Councillor Dermot Lacey, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2003
Jack and Bertha Weingreen

Jack and Bertha Weingreen were members of the Dublin Jewish community. They were active in the areas of education and youth development.

Jack Weingreen was a distinguished teacher, writer and professor of Hebrew at Trinity College, Dublin. His wife, Bertha, came from South Africa, where she had taught English and Drama at a training college for African teachers.

In 1945, Jack and Bertha joined the Jewish Relief Unit, which cared for the remnants of European Jewry who had survived the Nazi concentration camps. Bertha was Chief Welfare Officer responsible for all Jewish DPs (Displaced Persons) in the British Zone, and was stationed at the former military barracks at Bergen-Belsen. Jack joined her there in 1946 as Director of Education for all DPs, which included concentration camp survivors as well as thousands of Polish Jews who fled back to Germany from Poland after a series of pogroms on Jews returning to their towns after the war.

Following a visit to the British sector of divided Berlin, Bertha discovered a number of Jewish children who had been hidden during the war. She set up a kindergarten and organised a crate of toys to be sent by the Dublin JYRO (Jewish Youth Relief Organisation). As the harsh winter of 1946 approached, the Weingreens once again turned to JYRO, which sent large bales of Donegal tweed to be made into winter clothing by tailors in the DP camp. Linen mills in Northern Ireland donated material for nappies to cater for the ‘baby boom’ following numerous marriages in the DP camps. At the same time, Jack established a flourishing trade school at Belsen, which was later transformed by ORT (the International Jewish Organisation for Rehabilitation through Training) into a top-grade technical college.

Jack and Bertha returned to Dublin in 1947. One of the memories from this traumatic period in Europe that haunted them most vividly was a visit Bertha made to a hospital for sick child survivors in Lubeck: when she entered the small ward, the faces of the children resembled the faces of the mummies that can be seen in museums.

Instead of arms and fingers lying on the blankets, there were sticks, at the end of which were claws. The shock was overwhelming and in the corridor Bertha shed bitter tears at what had been done to these children, in the last stages of hunger and abuse.

The couple continued to play a prominent part in Irish academic life and in the life of Dublin’s Jewish community until their deaths in the 1990s.

Chaim Herzog

Born in Ireland during the Civil War, Chaim Herzog went on to become President of the State of Israel. In 1945, this Irishman visited the newly liberated Bergen-Belsen camp. The following extract is taken from Herzog’s autobiography, Living History, (New York, 1996).

The horrors of the concentration camps were revealed to an unbelieving world when Bergen-Belsen fell to the British Eighth Corps, who were fighting and advancing on our right flank. When there was a lull in the fighting, I drove to Bergen-Belsen, having heard whispers of the atrocities that had occurred there. The sight of the living, emaciated skeletons was by now horribly familiar to me but that familiarity didn’t make it any less terrifying. The entire scene was made more apocalyptic – if that’s even possible – by the fact that, because typhus raged throughout the camp, the wooden barracks were being burned to the ground. I told some of the survivors I was a Jewish officer from Palestine. They burst into tears.
Agnes Bernauer was born into a family of ‘religious reversals’. Her father, Rudolf, was a Jew educated by Benedictine monks; her mother, Emmy, was of the Lutheran faith. Agnes herself, although she would ultimately become a Catholic, was brought up a Protestant.

The family was immersed in the flourishing theatrical and cabaret scene of the early twentieth century in Berlin, at the forefront of which were Germany’s Jews. Rudolf owned, managed and wrote for several Berlin theatres.

When Hitler came to power in 1933 it became almost impossible for the family to earn money. They were protected only by Rudolf’s foreign birth: whenever an official asked for his racial credentials, he always wrote ‘Hung-aryan’. Their German nationality was withdrawn but they were able, because Rudolf had been born abroad, to obtain Hungarian passports.

Realising that having a Jewish parent would mean that she could never become an actress in her native Germany, Agnes begged her father to take her abroad. In a few weeks Rudolf was on his way to Britain with nothing of his savings except a gold watch, which he pawned on arrival in London. Agnes joined him in late 1936.

Just before war broke out in 1939, Agnes’s mother, who had remained in Berlin, went out to dinner with a friend. Upon her arrival at the restaurant she found two SS men seated at her table. They told her that they knew she had a Jewish husband and half-Jewish daughter in England, but that she would be allowed to redeem herself by agreeing to smuggle documents and packages to Nazi party members in London. Agnes’s mother left the restaurant immediately, returned home to fetch her passport and spent the night in the railway station. The next morning she left Berlin for London.

Several of Agnes’s Jewish relatives were not lucky enough to find a way out of Germany. Her widowed aunt Gisela, her cousin Ilma and Ilma’s husband were caught and sent to Bergen-Belsen. Gisela remarried there but neither she nor her new husband survived. Ilma’s husband also died in Bergen-Belsen, but Ilma survived and was able to rebuild her life.

Agnes began her acting career in England with the Free German League of Culture, a German anti-Nazi refugee group that produced revues in a small theatre. As an enemy alien she found difficulty in obtaining a work permit, but eventually did so and began a career on the stage that brought her great success.

After America entered the war, Agnes and Rudolf were recruited by the Office of Strategic Service, which would eventually become the CIA. Agnes became ‘Vicky’, the presenter of a radio request programme aimed at Germany, for which Rudolf wrote scripts and translated English song lyrics. Under a mysterious superior known as ‘the beard’, Agnes and her colleagues were part of an operation purporting to be a freedom station broadcasting from Nazi-occupied territory.

As ‘Vicky’, Agnes broadcast coded messages to British agents – information more accurate than the official German news – and jazz, which had been outlawed in Germany as alien and decadent. Pretending to be a patriotic German, ‘Vicky’ suggested food shortages in order to induce panic buying, played cheerful songs for supposedly surrounded German units in order to lower morale, and even indulged in jokes at the Nazis’ expense.

On the first day of peace, 18 August 1945, Agnes married Desmond Leslie (of Castle Leslie) in Co Monaghan, Ireland. Desmond was a Spitfire pilot and cousin of Winston Churchill. The couple had two sons and a daughter. Agnes acted in many stage and film roles as well as becoming an international cabaret singer. She divorced Leslie and eventually settled in Sandymount, Dublin, with the writer Maurice Craig. Agnes died in 1999.

After a time we became more ambitious with our programming. By ‘we’ I mean our little troupe in Newton Longville – sound expert, writers, singers and pianist. We began to manufacture whole troop concerts. Pretending that our songs and sketches were performed by soldiers and nurses at the front, we acted and sang them ourselves in the most endearing and amateurish way. The Allied invasion of Europe was now imminent and coded messages were sent out to our agents behind the enemy lines in the form of record numbers and labels. I could never tell how effective all this was in influencing the progress of the campaign, but I was told of one incident where my programme had actually been instrumental in capturing a U-boat. I did not know about that until after the war.

From The Fun Palace: An Autobiography, Agnes Bernelle (Dublin, 1996)
The Newryman who helped bring Jews to safety

Sergeant Peter Joseph Markey from Newry was part of the unsuccessful British parachute assault on Arnhem in September 1944. Markey was incarcerated in Sagan prisoner-of-war camp in Germany and was liberated by the Russians in February 1945. Desparate to return to Britain, Markey realised that the best route was to go east, via Odessa. He met a horse and cart which turned out to be driven by two Jews, Hans Andriesse from Holland and his friend Sal Berkovitz, a Czech-born Belgian. They invited Markey to climb aboard and travel with them. Markey resolved to find a way to repay their kindness.

Hans and Sal had just been liberated by the Russians. Due to severe illness, they had been left to die when most of the inmates had been force-marched deeper into Germany before the Russians arrived. Hans had been imprisoned in Westerbork transit camp and was on the train to Auschwitz along with 1,710 Dutch Jews when it stopped in Kosel, where the able-bodied were ordered off. For 30 months Hans survived extreme conditions, ending up in Kittlitztreben.

Markey concocted a cover-story for Hans and Sal, which saved their lives. He gave them false identity papers, Royal Engineers’ numbers and Sagan POW numbers. At every stage of their tortuous journey east, Markey persuaded doubting Russian and British officers that Hans and Sal had volunteered their services to the British in Arnhem. The journey to Odessa took 15 days, after which the friends finally boarded a troop ship for Glasgow. They celebrated St Patrick’s Day on board with Markey, who waved wistfully at his native country as they sailed around the west coast of Ireland for Scotland. Of the 107,000 Dutch Jews transported to the east by the Nazis, only 5,000 survived. Of the 550 men who alighted from the train at Kosel, only 30 survived. The women, children and elderly who remained on that train were murdered in Auschwitz. Not one of the Kittlitztreben prisoners force-marched west before the Russians liberated the camp survived.

Dermot Harte

It is strangely silent. It is depressing in its familiarity and familiar in its desolation. Within the complex the gates bear the slogan ‘Arbeit macht frei.’ (‘Work makes you free!’) Once inside, the temperature appears to have dropped considerably. It is most noticeable. I recall a sudden shiver. Had I brought a jacket with me? I had! It was needed! […]

Time has left its mark, but a museum was constructed within the camp to preserve the truth. Included are thousands of artefacts. There are suitcases and spectacles. There are shoes and personal clothing. There are family photographs from happier times. There are the striped pyjama-type uniforms that the inmates were forced to wear. Some are in rags. There are greasy-looking objects which look like large grey snowflakes.

These are the ashes of the slaughtered and they speak to us in terrible tones. […]

But can museums depict the whole story? Surely the whole truth can only be found in the hearts and in the minds and in the memories of those who were present at the time and who survived. Will the trauma ever leave them? Will their memories of the horrors remain with them all the days of their lives? […]

Why should we keep the memory of the Holocaust alive? Is it not for reasons of revenge? Is it to perpetuate hatred? […] The answer is obvious for all who have the will to listen!

It should NEVER be forgotten because it could so easily happen all over again!

In this, the twenty-first century, we are sadly living in a world where raw hatred of other races, religions, cultures and beliefs abound and respect for others is fast becoming yesterday’s memory. Where human life is cheap, our world might be perilously close to the time when the killing fields and the extermination camps could be reconstructed. The future lies in our hands and in those of our children and our children’s children. It is a sacred trust, lest we forget.
Seán Deegan was born in 1925 in Dublin. As a teenager he joined the British army and became an RAF navigator and pilot. He formed part of the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944, when the Allied forces invaded Normandy. Many years later he was approached by the film director Steven Spielberg to consult on the making of the film Saving Private Ryan, which dealt with the D-Day assault.

After arriving on continental Europe, he was sent on a Harley Davidson motorcycle around war-ridden Europe in search of crashed aircraft. He would examine them and decide whether or not they could be repaired. If not, they were harvested for parts, which were sent back to Britain.

In April 1945, informed by his internal radio that a ‘horror camp’ had been discovered in northern Germany, Seán decided to try to help. He was one of the first Allied soldiers to enter Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Discovering the brutality of the camps changed his outlook on the war, which up until then had been an adventure. He said: *When you went through these camps, if you met any Germans, it was their hard luck. You had no hesitation in revenge. They had brutalised these people so much that there was just hatred in your heart.*

The experience affected him deeply. *I couldn’t shake off the smell of death I experienced that day and even now, all these years later, I sometimes get flashbacks and the smell returns as if it was yesterday.* However, on his return from Germany Seán found that his testimony was received with disbelief in Ireland. He himself was treated with mistrust as an Irishman who had ‘taken the King’s shilling’.

In 1958, missing the sense of brotherhood he had experienced in the army, Seán became a Franciscan friar. As part of his work, he helped to initiate the Simon Community in Dublin and, with the aid of some students, he ran soup kitchens in the basement of his friary. Eventually, in 1970, the first Simon house in Dublin was opened at Sarsfield Quay.

In 1978, while working at Gormanstown College near Dublin, he co-founded the Special Olympics in Ireland, despite opposition from those in charge of orphanages and homes for children with learning disabilities, who were reluctant to allow the children to mix with the wider public. Two years later he took the first Irish team to the international event in America. Brother Columbanus’s involvement with the Special Olympics culminated when Ireland hosted the international event in 2003.

Brother Columbanus moved to Waterford, where he continued to work with the homeless and drug addicts for the rest of his life. He died in 2007 and is remembered fondly for his compassion and selflessness.
Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty, the ‘Vatican Pimpernel’

Born in Lisrobin, Kiskeam in 1898 to a staunchly republican family, Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty grew up in Killarney and earned his BA degree in Theology. He was ordained in Rome in 1925 and appointed to the Vatican Diplomatic Service, serving in Egypt, Haiti, Santo Domingo and Czechoslovakia before returning to Rome in 1938 to work in the Holy Office.

A 1929, the Lateran treaty between the Italian Fascist government and the Pope had made the Vatican an independent state. Thus, unlike the rest of Italy, it was not under Nazi control during the war years.

Monsignor O’Flaherty initially dismissed accounts of Nazi atrocities as Allied propaganda. When the war started, I used to listen to broadcasts from both sides. All propaganda, of course, makes the same terrible charges against the other. I frankly didn’t know which side to believe – until they started rounding up the Jews in Rome. They treated them like beasts. You know the sort of thing that happened after that. It got worse and worse, and I knew then which side I had to believe.

In the autumn of 1942, he started smuggling and hiding refugees from the Germans and Italians, who were targeting prominent Jews and anti-Fascists. He had a network of helpers, prominent among whom were several Irish people.

Every evening Monsignor O’Flaherty would stand in the porch of St Peter’s, in plain view of the German soldiers across the piazza. One of the Jews who approached him at his usual post proceeded to unwind a gold chain that went twice around his waist.

My wife and I expect to be arrested at any moment, said the Jew. We have no way of escaping. When we are taken to Germany we shall die. But we have a small son; he is only seven and is too young to die. Please take this chain and take the boy for us too. Each link of the chain will keep him alive for a month. Will you save him? The Monsignor improved upon this plan: he accepted the chain, hid the boy and procured false papers for the parents. At the end of the war he returned the boy and the chain.

In the spring of 1943, Monsignor O’Flaherty’s operation broadened to include escaped British POWs caught behind enemy lines. His fledgling, informal network of contacts was transformed into The Organisation — a huge partisan effort to save Jews, soldiers and refugees of many creeds and nationalities. Monsignor O’Flaherty hid them in monasteries and convents, at Castel Gandolfo, in his old college of the Propaganda Fide, in his own residence, the German College, and in his network of apartments. He provided them with food, clothing and money to reimburse the Italian families who risked their lives to hide them.

It is estimated that The Organisation and Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty were responsible for saving more than 6,500 people.

On being asked about his exploits during the war, O’Flaherty remarked: These were dark days and I shall always remember the difficulties we had in trying to keep one step ahead of the Gestapo.

Monsignor O’Flaherty continued to help all those seeking assistance even after the liberation of Rome. He was awarded the CBE by Britain and the Silver Medal of Military Valour by the President of Italy. The Monsignor remained in Rome until his health deteriorated in 1960 and he returned to Caherciveen in Co Kerry after suffering a stroke. He died on 30 October 1963.

In his obituary which appeared in the Munget College Journal, Fr Francis Joy wrote: Hugh O’Flaherty was above all a generous honest-to-God Irishman without guile. His big heart was open to any and every distress and he was lavish in his efforts to assuage suffering in any form.

A grove of trees was planted in memory of Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty in the National Park in Killarney in 1994. To mark the occasion, the Irish poet Brendan Kennelly wrote:

There is a tree called freedom and it grows Somewhere in the hearts of men, Rain falls, ice freezes, wind blows, The tree shivers, steadies itself again, Steadies itself like Hugh O’Flaherty’s hand, Guiding trapped and hunted people, day and night, To what all hearts love and understand, The tree of freedom upright in the light.

From The Vatican Pimpernel, Brian Fleming, 2008
Summons

Meditate that this came about. Imagine.
Pyjama ghosts tramp the shadow of a chimney.
Shorn and nameless. Desolation’s mad machine
With endless counts and selections. Try to see!
For each who survived, every numbered
Arm that tries to hold the wedding guest,
A thousand urgent stories forever unheard;
In each testimony a thousand more suppressed.
A Polish horizon glows with stifled cries:
Who’ll wake us from this infinite nightmare?
Out of the cone of Vesuvius their lives rise
To sky-write gaunt silences in the frozen air.
A summons to try to look, to try to see.
A muted dead demand their debt of memory.

Micheal O’Siadhail
A handful of Irish Jesuit priests were called upon to serve as chaplains to the British forces during World War II. For one particular chaplain this tour of duty included being present at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Michael Morrison was born in Listowel, Kerry, in 1908. He went to school in Limerick and then in Mungret, where he distinguished himself on the hurling pitch. After entering the novitiate in 1925, he spent several years of study in Tullabeg, Co Offaly and then in Dublin. His skill at Gaelic sports was noticeable when he taught at Belvedere College, Dublin, where he trained the hurling team amongst his myriad of other duties.

Michael Morrison was ordained in 1939. When an appeal was issued for priests to act as chaplains to the British troops, Fr Morrison volunteered, becoming one of the first to be appointed. His first posting was with the Eighth Army in Egypt, but many months in the north African desert did little to prepare him for where he was sent soon afterwards. In April 1945, when Morrison was serving with the 32nd Casualty Clearing Unit in northern Germany, a state of emergency was declared at a concentration camp in nearby Bergen-Belsen. A truce had been called by the German troops in the surrounding area, who handed over the camp to the British. Morrison’s unit was with them.

When Michael Morrison reached Bergen-Belsen on 17 April 1945, the conditions he found were indescribable – so much so that the main section of the camp was nicknamed the ‘Horror Camp’. Thousands of bodies, dead and dying, littered the ground and those well enough to do so vied for space inside the congested barracks. Typhoid was rife.

On 22 April, under a torrential downpour and before a large congregation of many different religions, Morrison celebrated the first Mass in Belsen. With the help of Rev. Stanislaus Kadjiolka, the only priest among the former prisoners still strong enough to work, they began to administer the last rites to the dying. Typhus raged through the camp and prisoners continued to die in their hundreds for weeks after the liberation. The priests anointed hundreds of people daily and the number rose as they grew more efficient. Even so, many of Belsen’s Catholics died without receiving the Sacraments.

After demobilisation Fr Michael Morrison went to Australia, where he worked as a teacher. After that, he spent some time in Manchester before returning to Ireland. He spent the rest of his career at Belvedere College, Dublin, where he was a much respected member of staff.

Fr Morrison died in April 1973. He was deeply affected by his experiences at Bergen-Belsen, which took their toll on the physical vigour that was so evident in his youth: the war marked the beginning of a slow decline in Morrison’s health. He left behind an invaluable archive of photographs, film and diaries of his work in Bergen-Belsen as chaplain to the British forces in 1945.

In marking Holocaust Memorial Day we, as civilised nations, are paying homage to all the victims of the Holocaust. It is also an opportunity to pay tribute to all the remarkable and courageous people who bravely stood against the forces of evil. Here in Ireland we can be proud to count Irish citizens among those exceptional people who saved thousands of lives.

President Mary McAleese, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2004
Dear Fr Provincial

It is time I gave you some account of my work since I came to Belsen Concentration Camp. This place has been receiving quite a lot of publicity on the B.B.C. and English papers of late. I have seen some of the pictures reproduced in the papers but they fall very short of giving a proper idea of the horror of this place. What we met with in the first few days is utterly beyond description. In an earlier letter I think I mentioned that in my first cursory look round the camp I saw fifteen hundred dead bodies. That was a very much underestimated guess […]

In the first ten days my work was just anointing the dying with short breaks for meals. I find it very hard to give an idea of how many I did anoint but on some days I must have got close on three hundred. There is still more than we can cope with. A second chaplain arrived about a week ago with a general hospital. We are now setting up hospitals and this C.C.S. which normally has two hundred beds is now looking after seven thousand. The patients are housed in a German military barracks quite close to the concentration camp. When we can get accommodation ready we expect to have fifteen to seventeen thousand patients. A number of German doctors and nurses are being roped in to help but the staff is still absurdly inadequate. Even at present we have more sick than all hospitals in 21 Army Group had at their highest peak point. Add to this the language difficulty and you have some idea of the chaos. We have Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Russians, French, Belgians, Dutch &c.

The work here has been physically the most revolting that I have been called on to do but it has also been the most consoling. Even if I had done no other work since I joined up I consider my four years in the army were worth while.

Very best wishes
Yours sincerely in XT

M.G. Morrison

From Fr Michael Morrison SJ to Provincial,
Irish Jesuit Archives CHP2/29 (unpublished, 11 May 1945)
Espionage in Ireland

In the years before the war a dossier named *Falls Gruen* (Case Green) had been produced. It contained high-quality photographs of strategic installations in Ireland and aerial images of Dublin, Belfast, Bangor and Larne. It constituted a clear and detailed plan for the invasion of Ireland. The dossier, recovered from the headquarters of the Luftwaffe in 1945, was the work of some very industrious Nazi agents.

Various Irish people were members of the German military and intelligence forces during World War II. Several of them even served with the notorious SS.

Some within the Irish republican movement at that time adhered to the old adage, ‘England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity,’ believing that the exchange of military help and intelligence between Ireland and Germany was the best way of achieving republican goals. Perhaps the most infamously republican collaborator with the Nazi régime was Frank Ryan. Ryan was an IRA activist who had fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. While in Spain he had been arrested and imprisoned, but was effectively allowed to escape through the influence of the Abwehr.

In 1940 a POW camp was set up at Friesack in eastern Germany specifically to house Irish prisoners. The idea was that they could be won over to the German side and carry out missions of sabotage and espionage against Britain. There were eventually 180 Irishmen at Friesack. The Germans were successful in recruiting several of them.

The first to be taken from Friesack for training were Corporal John Codd, an eccentric soldier from County Laois, and Frank Stringer from County Leitrim. They underwent radio and explosives training in Berlin. Several months later a new group of Irish recruits to the German side left Friesack to begin training. They were Sergeant Thomas Cushing, Corporal Andrew Walsh and Private Patrick O’Brien, all from Tipperary, Private William Murphy from Wexford and a man known as Private James Brady, although it seems that this was a pseudonym. Soon afterwards, Walsh and Brady were removed from the rest and given more advanced instruction. Various missions were mooted for them. Brady’s proposed task was to go to Belfast and gain employment with the Harland & Wolff shipyard – whose workers were notorious for their intense unionism – and set up a gang of republican saboteurs!

Brady, having failed in an audition for the Irish section of German radio, ended up on the same farm as his friend Stringer. Of no more use to the Abwehr, they were approached by the rival intelligence service of the SS and underwent further training. Their superior, however, concluded that they were too unreliable to be radio operatives. They were given the opportunity of enlisting instead in the Waffen-SS, the SS’s combat wing, where they received the so-called ‘key to Valhalla’ – the tattoo under the left armpit showing the blood group of the bearer and branding him a member of the SS.

In February 1943, Codd was released from prison in Dusseldorf and invited to work for the SS intelligence service. He was introduced to another Irishman, John O’Reilly, who, like Stringer and Brady, had been in the Channel Islands when the German army moved in. He had worked for the Luftwaffe, then recruited a group of Irishmen in Jersey as war workers for the Reich. After that he had moved on to Irland-Redaktion, the Irish division of the German radio service. In June 1942, O’Reilly approached a member of the SS and volunteered for the German intelligence services.

O’Reilly was unwilling to work with Codd, so he approached another Irishman. John Kenny was an IRA
member from Kerry. He had spent the previous several years working as a driver for a German officer. The pair left Germany for Ireland in December 1943. O’Reilly was dropped from a plane over his native Kilkee, County Clare, but suspicious locals forced him to turn himself in to the gardaí a few days later. Shortly after O’Reilly was taken into custody, Kenny parachuted into the same area, but was badly hurt in a poor landing. He was found in the early hours of the morning by a local farmer, who alerted the gardaí. The two were held in Arbour Hill Prison, Dublin, from where O’Reilly escaped in 1944. He made his way back to Kilkee, but his father soon turned him in and collected a substantial reward. Both he and Kenny were held in Arbour Hill until the end of the war.

In March 1944 Stringer and Brady were selected for SS Jager Battailon 502 and then Jagdverband Mitte, both commanded by Otto Skorzeny, who had effected Mussolini’s escape from prison several months previously. (Skorzeny, in fact, would eventually spend the years 1959–1969 in Ireland, even buying a farm in County Kildare.) These units were involved in the events following the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler in 1944, the kidnap of the son of the Hungarian regent, Admiral Horthy, who had been conspiring with the Russians, as well as forays behind American lines using American uniforms.

In early 1945, Jagdverband Mitte was deployed to help stop the Red Army crossing the river Oder and entering the German heartland. Under intense fire from the Russians, it was eventually overcome. Brady was injured; Stringer claimed he had not been fighting, but it is unclear whether that was indeed the case.

When the Russians finally reached Berlin Brady took part in the battle for the city. He was wounded in the legs and again hospitalised. Stringer, still with Jagdverband Mitte, was withdrawn to the mountains of the Tyrol. After the German surrender he made his way to Brussels, where he gave himself up. He was court-martialled in April 1946; he escaped the death sentence but received a fourteen-year prison sentence, remitted to eight – of which he served only four, in Wormwood Scrubs prison.

Brady was put to work in an Allied POW camp at Luneville and due to be repatriated to Germany, but escaped early in 1946. He finally turned himself in in Berlin and was tried by court-martial in December. He too was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years, remitted to twelve. He may also have been released in 1950.

John Codd had been living in Lehnitz, the location of the SS radio school he had attended, at the end of the war. He and his German wife, under a cover story, were able to make their way back to Ireland. He was known to the Irish military intelligence service and was taken into custody but later released.

Hitler’s spies

The National Socialist party in Germany had branches in all countries where there were German party members. Ireland was no exception. Its branch of the Auslands-Organisation – the overseas department of the Nazi party – was set up in 1934.

The group met in a German social club behind the Court Laundry in Dublin’s Harcourt Street. Its membership was small, being limited to members who still held a German passport, and included several prominent figures in Irish society: Heinz Mecking, manager of the Turf Development Board, Otto August Reinhardt, who worked in the Department of Lands, and Adolf Mahr, who became Director of the National Museum of Ireland. In general, German spies in Ireland were not very successful. It has been suggested that they were deliberately chosen to fail by Admiral Canaris, head of the Abwehr, who secretly worked against the Nazi régime after 1938. One spy, for example, was an Indian, whose conspicuous appearance immediately attracted police attention and he was soon arrested. Most other agents were quickly rounded up after their arrival in the country. They were held at Athlone Barracks, County Westmeath.

The so-called ‘master spy’, Hermann Görtz, parachuted into Ireland at Ballivor, County Meath, wearing a Luftwaffe uniform and military medals from the First World War. As well as gathering information on Ireland’s defence infrastructure, Görtz was in part responsible for fostering the abortive links between Germany and the IRA.

Brought in after being observed by G2 for 18 months, Görtz apparently lost his reason in custody. After his release, terrified of being captured by the Soviets after being sent home, he committed suicide by swallowing a cyanide tablet.
Adolf Mahr

Adolf Mahr was head of the Dublin branch of the Nazi party. Originally from Austria, he was an archaeologist and was appointed to the prestigious position of Director of the National Museum of Ireland in July 1934. He was also Gruppenleiter or group leader of the Auslands-Organisation in Ireland.

Mahr was responsible for recruiting party members in Ireland and for spreading Nazi propaganda. It has been claimed that he managed to recruit around 23 Germans to the Nazi cause during his time as Gruppenleiter. Mahr was a zealous Nazi; Hitler gave him the title ‘Herr Professor’ and paid tribute to him in his birthday honours for services to Germany.

G2, the Irish military intelligence agency, kept a close eye on Mahr. In 1945 the head of that organisation wrote that Mahr was an open and blatant Nazi and made every effort to convert Irish graduates and other persons with whom he had association to Nazi doctrines and beliefs.

Mahr stepped down as Gruppenleiter in 1938, to avoid embarrassment to the government. He was unashamed of what he called his time as ‘Dublin Nazi No. 1’. However, he remained as Director of the National Museum. As such, he was privy to plans to hide Ireland’s art treasures in the event of a Nazi invasion.

In August 1939 he left Ireland with his family, to represent Ireland at an archaeology conference in Berlin. When war broke out he was unable to return so remained in Germany, also travelling to his native Austria. He eventually found employment in a German intelligence department advising on Irish cultural matters.

Helmut Clissmann and the IRA

Another Nazi party member hard at work in Ireland was Helmut Clissmann. Originally from Aachen, Germany, he arrived in Ireland as a student in the early 1930s. He became a lecturer in German and organised exchange programmes between Irish and German students. Clissmann soon came under suspicion by the government for his association with known Nazis. He was known to correspond with Adolf Mahr; he was also alleged to have been a German spy, but always denied this.

Clissmann was recalled to Germany in 1939 and went to work for the Foreign Ministry as an advisor on Irish matters. He later joined the army and was put to work planning operations involving Ireland. Finally, he joined the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service. He did not hesitate to use his contacts in his new position. He made several failed attempts to co-opt the IRA onto the Nazis’ side.

While in Ireland, Clissmann had been known not only for his association with the Auslands-Organisation but also for his association with republican elements. His wife, Elizabeth Mulcahy, came from a fiercely republican family and the couple were known to consort with IRA members. It is probable Clissmann considered these connections to be of benefit to Nazi intelligence.

Over the course of the Nazi period, contacts had been made between Germany and the IRA in Ireland, who shared the common aim of defeating the British. Among other attempts at collaboration, the Germans were given access to IRA intelligence, although they ultimately did not use it. The IRA even developed Plan Kathleen, whereby they would invade Northern Ireland with German assistance. The Germans, however, eventually dismissed this as unfeasible.

Clissmann managed to return to Ireland in 1948.

Charles Bewley

The Irish government largely depended on its diplomatic envoys for information on the political life of other European countries prior to and during the war years. The Irish diplomatic legations were very small and any personal bias on the part of the individual envoys could have a real effect. The Irish envoy to Berlin, Charles Bewley, was a pronounced antisemite in a position of considerable power regarding Ireland’s relationship with the German Jewish people.

Born in 1888, Bewley was a lawyer by profession and a nationalist by conviction. From the earliest days of his career, Bewley was given to anti-Jewish outbursts and made no secret of his opinions.

As Irish envoy to Berlin, Bewley attended the annual Nuremberg rallies and was a voluble supporter of National Socialism. He believed that the Jewish presence in Germany had a ‘demoralising’ effect on industry and
culture and that the Nazi policy of excluding Jews from public life echoed the beliefs of the great majority of the German people. He continued to hold this view even after the war.

Bewley’s reports to Dublin regurgitated the Nazi propaganda he had absorbed. Although he informed his superiors of the various antisemitic laws that were being enacted, he failed to mention the darkest aspects of those measures, such as deportations and the existence of concentration camps.

These reports did not directly influence the way the Irish government dealt with the German state or the developing refugee crisis. However, Bewley was a critical source of information for the Irish administration, and it is likely that his perceptions coloured the scale and gravity of the Jews’ plight. Bewley did have direct influence when individual Jews in Berlin approached him requesting entry to Ireland. He refused a group of German Jewish medical students visas when they sought to be allowed to train in Ireland for a time before moving on to New Zealand.

Bewley feared that they would not eventually leave the country. On another occasion he withheld visas that had already been issued to Ernst Klaar, his wife Stella and son George, immediately after Kristallnacht. Although their visas were eventually handed over, Ernst Klaar made the mistake of moving to France instead of leaving immediately for Ireland. He was arrested by the French police and he and his wife, Stella, perished in Auschwitz.

A report on the state of German antisemitism written by Bewley in late 1938 showed the extent to which he had absorbed Nazi doctrine. In it he accused Jews of being responsible for every problem and threat to the state and concluded that: it is comprehensible that popular feeling had tended to become antisemitic.

Éamon de Valera finally sacked Bewley in August 1939 and he left the foreign service in a petulant and fractious spirit. Throughout the war Bewley continued to associate with members of the Nazi government and made frequent trips to Germany. Because of this association with Nazis, he narrowly escaped the gallows after the war ended.

How could this have happened?

Pastor Martin Niemoeller was arrested in 1937 for preaching against the Nazis, and spent until 1945 in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. After the war, he was instrumental in producing the “Stuttgart Confession of Guilt” in which the German Protestant churches formally accepted guilt for their complicity in allowing the suffering caused by Hitler’s reign. 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.
Voices from the Third Reich
Francis Stuart

Propaganda was a key feature of the Nazi régime. The Nazis carried out radio broadcasts in 55 languages to various countries, but their English-language material was all important. Several of those who were heard on the airwaves from Berlin were Irish.

Among them was Francis Stuart, a prolific writer who, by 1939, had already published ten novels as well as poetic and autobiographical works. Stuart was married to Iseult Gonne, daughter of WB Yeats’s beloved Maud Gonne. Iseult and her mother took a pro-German stance before and during the war, simply because they held strong republican views and were therefore fiercely anti-British.

Iseult was a friend of Edouard Hempel, the German ambassador to Ireland, and also of Helmut Gissmann of the German Academic Exchange Service. Gissmann organised a lecture tour in Germany for Stuart. He arrived in Berlin in April 1939 and began his career in Nazi-dominated academia. After the summer break spent in Ireland, during which war was declared, he returned to Germany. Sewed into the lining of his coat was a secret message from the IRA asking for German assistance in their campaign against Britain.

In Berlin, Stuart met Hermann Görtz, who was soon selected by the Abwehr to go to Ireland as a spy. On his arrival in Ireland, Görtz made his way to Stuart’s former home in Co Wicklow, where Iseult harboured him for some time. However, he was soon discovered by watchful villagers. Iseult was arrested and tried but acquitted for lack of evidence. After her release, Iseult began an affair with Görtz, who had escaped from Garda custody.

In July 1942, Stuart was telephoned by Dr Hans Hartmann, a Nazi and employee of the National Museum of Ireland, inviting him to take part in Irland-Redaktion broadcasts from Berlin. He agreed.

Although Stuart’s broadcasts were not overtly propagandist in tone, they can be classified as anti-democratic and pro-German.

When the war ended Stuart became a refugee. He made his way to Paris, where he and his lover Gertrud Meissner, who was suspected of being a spy, were imprisoned for eight months. Stuart did not return to Ireland until 1958, some years after Iseult’s death.

William Joyce

Another, more notorious, Nazi collaborator was William Joyce, nicknamed ‘Lord Haw-Haw’.

Joyce was born in New York to an Irish Catholic father who had emigrated from Mayo and an English Protestant mother of Ulster ancestry. The family returned to the west of Ireland in 1909, when Joyce was three years old.

As a young man, Joyce was extremely pro-British and hated Black and Tans; the IRA attempted to assassinate him in 1921. He fled to England, alone.

Joyce began his involvement in politics with the British Conservative party. At a Tory meeting in Lambeth in London, prior to the 1924 general election, Joyce was attacked with a cut-throat razor. His face was cut open from his right ear to his mouth, and he wore an angry scar for the rest of his life. Joyce always maintained, without foundation, that a Jewish communist had attacked him.

He studied English and History at Birkbeck College, London, where he gained a first-class degree. After that he worked as a tutor to support his wife and two daughters. In 1933 he joined Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists, ‘the Blackshirts’, and became a political orator. By 1933 he had become virulently antisemitic and espoused Nazism. By early 1934 he was Mosley’s Director of Propaganda.

Joyce was so vitriolic and excessive in his rhetoric that he became a source of embarrassment to Mosley. In 1937, among a hundred others, he was sacked.

With some other redundant Blackshirts, Joyce formed the National Socialist League, which failed to gain support. Hitler’s Third Reich acted as a magnet for him and, days before war was declared in September 1939, he took the boat from Dover.

Taken on initially as a translator by the German Foreign Office, Joyce soon began work with the German Broadcasting Corporation. A British journalist, reporting on Joyce’s broadcast style, characterised his nasal upper-class accent and indignant tone as ‘English of the haw-haw, damn-it-get-out-of-my-way variety’. Joyce thus came to be known as ‘Lord Haw-Haw’; his true identity was unknown in Britain.

Lord Haw-Haw’s broadcasts became very popular in Britain. He railed against the ultra-privileged and the ‘rotten’ class system and therefore appealed especially to members of the working class. He was popular, too, in Ireland, where there was some anti-British feeling that echoed his own.

Joyce’s broadcasts continued almost until the end of the war. He made his last broadcast in a drunken state on 30 April 1945, the same day that Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide.

With his second wife and fellow broadcaster, Margaret, Joyce fled to Denmark. While walking in the woods one day, he casually began a conversation with two British officers out gathering firewood. They recognised and captured him. After a high-profile trial at the Old Bailey, Joyce was found guilty of treason. He was hanged at 9am on 3 January 1946.
The Holocaust in Irish Public Life

Unveiling of Holocaust memorial, Listowel 1995

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.

The garden was established on reclaimed wasteland by the Rotary Club of Listowel supported by a small grant from EU development funds. The garden has since matured and developed into a beautiful and peaceful oasis, where the Holocaust monument takes pride of place and serves as a place of pilgrimage and reflection at various times of remembrance.

An Taoiseach, John Bruton, plants a tree at the Irish War Memorial, Islandbridge, to commemorate all of the victims of the Holocaust and fifty years since the end of World War II. In his address he said:

We in Ireland have not been immune from the bigotry and the indifference which manifested itself in Europe this century. Ireland’s doors were not freely open to those families and individuals fleeing from persecution and death. Some people did find refuge and comfort in Ireland, but their numbers were not very great. We must acknowledge the consequences of this indifference. Tonight, on behalf of the Irish government and people, I honour the memory of those millions of European Jews who died in the Holocaust. I also recall the Gypsies and the homosexual community who were marked down for extermination and all those who were persecuted for resisting the Nazi tyranny.

May 1995

The Irish Jewish Museum

The Irish Jewish Museum has a number of artefacts relating to the Holocaust and World War II. Most, if not all, were donated by individuals who had in some cases been directly affected by the Nazi regime in Europe.

Yellow ‘Juif’ Star: Donated to the museum by an elderly French lady who had been issued with the star when the Germans occupied France. For a short period she kept the star hidden beneath her coat to avoid persecution until one day she was witness to an accident in which a French girl of similar in age had been fatally injured. The donor exchanged her Jewish ID with the other girl, taking on her identity for the remainder of the German occupation, which almost certainly saved her from deportation and an unknown fate.

Lodz Ghetto Money: Donated by Mr and Mrs Goldfarb from New York, the money on display was currency developed for use inside the Lodz ghetto.

Burnt Torah Scroll: During a visit to Strasbourg Raphael Siev, Curator of the IJM, was presented with the burnt remains of a Torah scroll from a Strasbourg synagogue. The donor was a young girl when the Germans marched into Strasbourg and vandalised Jewish property. After the attack on her local synagogue she collected anything that was salvageable, which included the scroll on exhibit.

German Passport: The German passport on display belonged to Martha Bieler. On the opening page you can clearly see the large red ‘J’ stamped to indicate her religious identity.

Library: A bookcase and books relating to the Holocaust were donated to the museum in 2008. They are available for anyone who wants to read them in the museum, where the curator would be pleased to facilitate students, researchers and interested members of the public.
The Holocaust and the Arts in Ireland

The Holocaust as an inspiration for writing...

John Boyne, novelist, author of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

In 2004, when I first began to describe the story of a novel I was writing to friends and family, they stared at me as if I had lost my reason. A book for children set during the Holocaust? A novel whose ending appeared to offer no hope, only distress, to its reader? Just wait and see, I told them. Read it and then decide.

Bruno and Shmuel, the two nine-year-old boys at the heart of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, have one thing in common – they have both been taken away from people they love and from a place where they feel safe, and brought somewhere they don’t want to be. Ultimately, they are both victims of the Holocaust; one is brought to a concentration camp as a prisoner while the other resides there as the son of the camp’s commandant. They’re stripped of the typical accompaniments of childhood and come to rely on their own imaginations to make the world seem whole again. They play games and talk to each other about their past as they try to understand what has brought them to this terrible place.

There are those who feel that it is inappropriate to discuss these topics with children, that our children should not be confronted with visions of evil any sooner than necessary. There are those who feel distressed that Irish and international artists return to the subject time and again. Perhaps it’s because it seems vital that our young people grow up with an understanding of how intolerance and distrust can so easily be transformed into violence and unspeakable criminality. If they learn what has happened in the past, perhaps they will be sufficiently repelled by it to ensure that it never happens in the future.

In this respect the role of the writer and artist is crucial. We must continue to write stories and plays, compose songs and poetry, create films and works of art which keep the memories of those who were lost alive, and we must do so in a way which reaches out and grasps our audience, embraces them and allows them to become part of those stories that we tell.

It’s a source of satisfaction to me that artistic works representing the Holocaust continue to be created, for the great power of art is that it embraces differing opinions, it encourages debate, it allows us to have heated conversations with our closest friends and our dearest loved ones and through it all no one gets hurt, no one gets taken away from their families and no one gets killed.

Marilyn Taylor, writing for children

I am one of a generation born in Britain during the Second World War, who, however young, were stamped for life with vivid and frightening memories – air raid sirens, rushing to the shelter, and the threatening, unforgettable sound of V1 and V2 rockets.

But growing up in London and hearing the then very recent history of the Holocaust, I realised how lucky I had been. But for an accident of geography, my sister and I would have been among the one and a half million Jewish children who might have perished in the Holocaust.

I feel a responsibility to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust would be passed on to a younger generation. When I learned that Jewish refugee children, escaping the Nazis on a Kindertransport, had found a haven on Millisle Farm in Northern Ireland, I realised that I could write a novel with an Irish wartime setting. In it I could try to communicate to young readers something of the dreadful end to which antisemitism and racism could lead. In Faraway Home I tried to engage young Irish readers and convey how it might have felt to live in fear and danger, to be uprooted, separated from family and everything familiar and be forced to make a new life.

In 17 Martin Street I tried to show how the concern of children, and the decency and kindness of a few ordinary Irish citizens helped the girl to stay in Ireland despite the restrictive government policy towards Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi terror.
**The Holocaust as an inspiration for writing...**

John MacKenna, playwright, author of *Who By Fire*

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Goebbels stood at a swastika-bedecked rostrum on the Unter den Linden, a wide, tree-lined street in Berlin, that ran past the University and the State Opera House. He said:

>The age of extreme Jewish intellectualism has now ended. He threw a book into a fire.

It was like burning something alive, Lilian Mowrer said.

Then students followed with whole armfuls of books, while schoolboys screamed into the microphone their condemnation of this and that author, and as each name was mentioned the crowd booed and hissed. Lion Feuchtwanger’s books, which had already been banned from stores, went into the flames as did books by Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Brecht, Lenin, Marx, Engels, Zinoviev, Heine, Emil Ludwig, Helen Keller, Upton Sinclair and Jack London. Berthan von Suttner’s pacifist novel “Lay Down Your Arms” was condemned as “un-German” and burned. “All Quiet on the Western Front” got the most booing. Stefan Zweig’s books were nailed to a pillory as well as burned. It was May 10, 1933.

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Wherever they burn books, in the end will also burn human beings.

*Heinrich Heine 1797–1856*

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Aspects of history have a way of becoming part of our lives and, as a student of history in college and later as a teacher of history, the Holocaust has long been part of mine. Once I became acquainted with the events behind the term ‘Holocaust’ it became a living, breathing experience, which had little to do with dates and everything to do with the human experience. It was never going to be possible to turn away from the Holocaust; it was never conceivable that it be treated simply as an event or a series of events. It was always going to be a part of my life.

The writing of *Who By Fire* grew out of two things. First was the desire to find a story among the millions of Holocaust stories and, through its telling, to focus on a handful of lives. Loss on a scale like that of the Holocaust is impossible to relate effectively in theatre but individual loss finds an echo in the human heart. Second was the fact that the songs of Leonard Cohen – also long a part of my life – captured so eloquently the human condition that they seemed an ideal framework around which to build the play.

I was anxious when writing *Who By Fire* not to stray into the area of propaganda. Propaganda destroys the empathy of actors and audiences alike. We live for and by stories. We learn from them and we relate to them. But, above all, we look in those stories for the human connection, the face that mirrors – to a greater or lesser extent – our own pain and loss. In identifying individuals, even if they were fictional creations, I hoped that the ghosts who peopled *Who By Fire* would draw some small part of their experience from the experiences of the millions who died in concentration camps.

Meeting Holocaust survivor Zoltan Zinn-Collis, hearing his story and having him talk for hours with the cast suddenly brought a new dimension and depth of experience to the whole production. Here was a man who had lived with death, who had survived the annihilation of his family, who could look back with the passion of one remembering clearly. Here was a man with whom I had worked as a student in summer employment without ever knowing his story. Here was a man whose compassion and humour belied everything he had suffered. Here was a figure of inspiration. Above all, here was a man who was keeping alive the memory of what humans are capable of doing to humans. And that, I believe, is more essential now than ever. The economy that has brought migrant workers from all over the world is beginning to stagger. The inevitable consequence is the fingering of the weak, the alienation of minorities, the pushing of those who are different ever further to the margins. Now, more than ever, we need to remember and to avoid even a hint of the dark atrocities of the past.
What motivated you to write about the Holocaust – in fact, to write a whole book about it?
A decision to devote years to such a book was not taken lightly. I think there is both an emotional and intellectual level. I believe that the Holocaust was never fully confronted and only in facing it can we hope to avoid repeating such genocides. The general crisis of belief in humanity in the wake of the Holocaust overshadowed my youth. I felt it was the right time for a poet born just after the war to try to distil the story in poetry for another generation.

Do you feel that art has a responsibility to respond to such things?
I think of poetry as a ‘ministry of meaning’, an attempt to make sense of the world we live in and to prepare it for those who come after us. I certainly felt called to try and retell how at the heart of civilised Europe six million people were systematically killed and to understand how that incredible event affected the ethos of our times.

At one point you link Irish history with the Jewish story:

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

To what extent was your engagement with the Holocaust that of an Irishman?
Well, as your quotation suggests, in some incommensurable way, all great human tragedies resonate with each other, whether it’s the wiping out of eastern European ghettos, slavery or famine. The fact that I’m Irish and conscious of the story of the Great Famine may, of course, predispose me to an imaginative understanding of the unspeakable suffering the Holocaust involved.

What in your view is the relationship between art and history (or testimony) as regards the Holocaust?
I spent many years reading about the Holocaust and even so could only cover a portion of the overwhelming amount of testimony, historical study and imaginative literature. A work of art can distil both the personal and communal and allow us to interweave the intellectual, the spiritual and the political. It often occurs about sixty years after historical events, as say in the case of the Waverley novels, or War and Peace or the Gospels. Another generation tells the broader story before the last eyewitnesses die. It’s the crossover point between history and story.

You depict the evil of the Third Reich as a volcano giving rise to ‘black sun’, and talk about inexorable shifts of the earth, yet this is balanced with examinations of the individuals involved in perpetrating the Holocaust. Why did you choose to include these two forms of representation? And in terms of responsibility, were these individuals victims of inexorable forces or personally culpable, or both?
It seems to me that all history happens at the nodal point where social forces and individual responsibility meet. If we allow only for inexorable forces of history then we utterly diminish ourselves as human beings. On the other hand, all of us act within a social context. Geological and volcanic imagery suggest the momentum of history, while telling the individual stories of victims, resisters, survivors and perpetrators reminds us that every action counts.

Much of The Gossamer Wall is written in quite formal verse. Why did you choose the particular verse structures you used?
Any poem is a combination of content and form, however strict or loose. The content of each section and often every separate poem demands discernment and choice of form. For instance the pivotal section, ‘Figures’, which deals with the concentration camps, is a series of sonnets. Sonnets are often associated with Elizabethan love poems. It seems that overwhelming experiences, whether it’s love or suffering, often need to be held by a strong form.

How would you characterise the way the Holocaust is seen in modern Ireland?
The worrying thing is that it may not be deeply considered at all. We’re flooded with stimuli but the trivial can so often drown out the significant. However, I was heartened by the thoughtful reaction of many people to The Gossamer Wall. I was struck by how many it resonated with Irish history. The final section, ‘Prisoners of Hope’, seems to ring true to how we all cope with trauma. Evil does not have the last word and in order to refuse the narrowings of any ideologies, we embrace the fullness of life in all its richness:

The Holocaust as an inspiration for writing...
Micheal O’Siadhail, poet, author of The Gossamer Wall: Poems in Witness to the Holocaust

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A raucous glory and the whole jazz of things…
We feast to keep our promise of never again.

Interview by Alicia McAuley
In the second year of my MFA at the University of Ulster, in 1997, I was given £200 to go somewhere in Europe that I felt would influence my work. At the time, I was doing a lot of work about the rise of neo-Nazism and racism, so I decided to go to Poland to visit the concentration camps of Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau and Stutthof.

Auschwitz I was much like a museum, but it was Birkenau (Auschwitz II), the killing camp, that was to change my life and my art forever. After walking through the main gatehouse, a sizeable building, then walking down one end of the camp by the now-infamous train tracks, I looked back at this very same gatehouse, now tiny, off in the distance. It was at this very moment that the size of the camp and the scale of what went on hit me like a tonne of bricks. It was like a huge pressure pushing down on me physically and emotionally. My knees gave way and I had to sit down on the spot and try and take in what seemed to be beyond belief.

When I got back to Ireland it took another year and a half of trying to deal with my feelings on the Holocaust through the medium of oil on canvas to realise that a change was needed. For me oil on canvas was just too polished a medium to try and depict anything to do with such a raw, open wound as the Holocaust.

I then started to do small working-visual-ideas, as I called them, on paper, to try and work out ideas and feelings I had in relation to the Shoah. I planned to channel what I learned in these smaller pieces back into the larger pieces. This never happened. The smaller pieces were more raw and seemed to suggest more of what I was feeling and wanted to say about the Holocaust.

If you go to the Irish Jewish Museum in Dublin you will see a copy of a document that shows you that an Irishwoman went through Auschwitz and perished there. If one Irish person died in the Holocaust, then we as a nation should want to know about it. It was tough for me to realise that Ireland had a closed-door policy to Jewish refugees during the war.

I have done 37 solo exhibitions so far, both at home and abroad. Any time I have an exhibition I try to do workshops with local schools and colleges or give public lectures about my work and my reasons for dealing with the Shoah. I have had people here in Ireland say things to me like, ‘Don’t you think the Holocaust has been done to death?’ or, ‘People are sick of hearing about it,’ or, ‘Don’t talk to me about the Holocaust – look what the Jews are doing to the Palestinians.’ I have even received hate mail.

After the Holocaust, the UN stated that never again would this happen. Sadly, we know that it has happened again and again, worldwide, but on a smaller scale in each case. But is not one person’s death one death too many? Humanity thought it knew itself until the Holocaust took place. Not only did millions of people die in these camps, but a certain part of humanity died as well.

\[\text{Filing In and Erasing Out, Tom Delohery}\]
Simon Watson is an Irish photographic artist currently living and working in New York. In 2006 he was commissioned by the State Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau to photograph parts of the buildings and camps. The museum now holds a copy of this exhibition in its archives.

“A Lingering Presence – Contemporary Photographs of Auschwitz”, Artist Statement: *During the winter of 2006, on three separate occasions, I visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum in Poland. With special permission granted by the museum, I gained access to photograph various sites and blocks that have not been seen or open to the public since liberation. It is also my understanding that these sites have never before been photographed.*

This work seeks to expose the lingering past of human presence at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It examines the notions of memory, transformation and melancholy.

Despite its transformation into a museum, these blocks have only a terrible history. For within these spaces history has remained stagnant, leaving behind the lingering presence of the past. The floors, walls and ceilings are those of the Holocaust; and the empty spaces are filled with the memory of the numberless dead and the perpetrators.

*It is often said about memorials that they should serve as a warning to us all against allowing such evil to happen again. And in this regard, the work is imperfect, because underlying the melancholy of the work is the disillusioned acceptance that it has happened again, that man does not learn from history, and that despite his capacity to do good, he has a predilection to evil, and continues to inflict terrible suffering upon his fellow man. Its imperfection could be said to lie in the fact that it requires us, in order to pay our respects, to intrude into the hallowed ground and empty spaces of Auschwitz-Birkenau – spaces which are so sacred to the memory of the dead that they should be left in silence until they, in turn, finally succumb to time and the elements.*

And yet, despite the imperfections of any memorial we may devise, we are impelled to remember and to keep remembering. And that is what ‘A Lingering Presence’ has sought to do. It draws us in and exhorts us to remember those who breathed the air of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other camps.
I was born and raised within the Jewish community in Ireland, and the Holocaust became a part of my perception of the world earlier than for my non-Jewish contemporaries. The grief, pain, anger and lack of comprehension that it engenders for me, together with a need to observe rituals associated with remembrance, are caused by shared experiences of ethnicity and culture with those who perished.

It would appear to me that the Holocaust is regarded in numerous ways in modern Ireland. To the young, it is a disaster which happened to an unfamiliar ethnic group in a different century. However, I am aware of many teachers, either with a genius for history or with genuine compassion for tragedy, who have presented the Holocaust in a visceral style, forcing students to identify it not just as another set of statistics, but also as a human calamity which saw western civilisation metamorphose into a demonic culture of aggressors, tormentors and innocents.

Among adults, I note various perspectives. There are those who mourn, and those who express guilt. There are those who regard the Holocaust as a prism through which they view all Jews and find it impossible to dissociate one from the other. There are also those who regard the Holocaust as one more massive loss of life, a far-off event, part of a lengthening list of famines and ethnic cleansing. There are even those who would assign a species of reflexivity to the Middle East situation, characterising Israelis (and therefore Jews) as Nazis, and everybody else as beleaguered victims.

A need and a duty to remind performers and audiences of the past initially motivated me to deal with the Holocaust in my work. This became more urgent when, in my early twenties, I attended a concert featuring a composition by Gideon Klein, who had written this work while imprisoned at Terezín and who was killed at Auschwitz shortly afterwards. Klein’s upbringing and educational background were not dissimilar to my own, but he died at the age I had reached then. I assumed the task of representing Klein and others like him in their preferred medium to contemporary audiences, and believe that art has a responsibility to respond to such things. A correlation exists between art and the human condition. Art is created with either a conscious or unconscious need to communicate, but the existence of art itself requires this need for communication in order to perpetuate itself.

Human history has imposed circumstances upon itself which forbid us to ignore or forget.

Music is, in my opinion, the ideal way to memorialise events of the past, because the different constituents of music (harmony, melody, sonority, rhythm) operate on so many different levels and are prone to be interpreted in infinitely different ways. When the listener hears a piece of music that explores a particular subject, then that listener becomes obliged to engage with the subject in his or her unique way with an immediacy not often present in other art forms. This is due to the ephemeral nature of music: we hear it and it is gone, unlike those media which can be presented visually and examined at leisure.

Melanie Brown Holocaust-related works include:

- **Three Blessings** (1995)
  choir; orchestra

- **I Have Not Seen a Butterfly Around Here** (1996)
  piano; cello; flute

- **Chanting** (1997)
  a capella choir

- **The Holocaust: A One-Act Opera** (1997)
  soloists; chorus; orchestra

- **The Miraculous Light** (1998)
  solo tenor; choir; piano

- **The Tomb** (2001)
  solo piano

I am currently engaged in a new project, inspired by paintings and woodcuts, a legacy of men and women who died in the concentration camps. This will be premiered in February 2009.
A native of New York, Sam Notkin was born in Brooklyn in 1925 to Russian-Jewish parents who had emigrated to America in the early years of the twentieth century. His childhood was full of stories of “Old Russia” and conversation often centred on international matters. From the time he was old enough to read, Sam wanted to travel to Europe.

In his early teens Sam became aware of events in Europe through letters from members of his extended family living in Russia, France and Germany. He became intensely concerned about the Nazis and developed a burning desire to combat them, physically and ideologically. In 1939 the letters ceased to arrive because of censorship but stories still filtered through from Europe by word of mouth.

Determined to do what he could, at the age of eighteen Sam volunteered to join the US army in 1943. He underwent training in advanced infantry, and as a radio operative. Being so highly motivated, he was sought out by some of his fellow soldiers – mostly poor, uneducated men from the American south – to explain what the Nazi menace meant, not only to Jews but to the entire world.

On completion of his final training in England, Sam’s unit went into combat in France, Belgium and finally in Germany. In Normandy, Sam became the official French translator for his unit and was charged with finding out from the local people the location and disposition of nearby German units. As translator, he managed to negotiate the exchange of surplus army rations for a quantity of Calvados, an apple brandy made in the region, which proved to be a great comfort to Sam’s infantry company during the freezing winter of 1944!

As his company was approaching a German Panzer unit during the Battle of the Bulge, a fragment from an exploding shell struck Sam’s foot. He was pulled back to various hospitals in France and England before being transferred back to America. His army unit, the Ninety-Ninth Infantry Division, went on to liberate the concentration camp at Buchenwald.

After the war Sam studied Economics at Columbia University in New York, then spent five years in France, where he also worked for the American embassy in Paris. After his time in Paris, Sam was hired by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and was based in London for many years. He travelled extensively developing and encouraging investment and trade links with New York from all over the world. Thus he also made frequent trips to Ireland, becoming familiar with the country and its people.

In 2001 Sam married Kay, who was working in the American embassy in Ireland, and the couple settled in Dublin, which Sam says has been a good home.

I knew enough to want to enlist. I considered myself fortunate that I was one kid who had a rifle and was willing to use it to stop and destroy this ‘monstrous evil’, as I called it. I sought to brief myself about it with whatever sources I could find. There were some political writers, some very aware and sensitive young rabbis, and many Christian sympathisers who realised that the Nazis were a danger to the world.

I encouraged whatever soldiers were interested to come to me. It made sense to them when I told them, ‘These are killers. They have no respect for life other than their own. They think they’re the master race. If they’re not obliterated in Europe they won’t let an ocean stop them. They’ll hook up with the Japanese and we will be fighting on our own doorstep.’ I wanted my colleagues to know why they were there and I’m convinced that understanding what the war was about helped many of them to survive.

I had the frustration of not being there for the end, but I also had the satisfaction that I had contributed something and that my unit had gone on to help administer the death-blow to the Third Reich. If we hadn’t destroyed the Nazis in Europe the whole world would have been at risk. We helped to prevent future tragedies.

War is a hellish thing. But when all else has failed and it becomes a matter of protecting humanity from the threat the Nazis represented, we shouldn’t shirk from it. We should be ever aware of the possibility that inhumane acts will spread and we should try to prevent this when we can.
Holocaust Memorial Day 2009

Many people in Ireland know some details about the Holocaust, but most won’t know what it’s like to be a child of Holocaust survivors. Leon Litvack grew up in Canada, the adopted only child of a Jewish couple, both from Radom in south-eastern Poland.

His mother, Pola, was the youngest of a modern Orthodox family; she was sixteen when war broke out in 1939. She was soon rounded up and put into one of the city’s two ghettos, where she witnessed her own mother being shot by the Nazis. When the ghetto was liquidated Pola was deported to Majdanek concentration camp and then to Auschwitz. There her prisoner number was tattooed on her forearm: A17074. On two occasions Pola was selected for death in the gas chamber but twice she managed to escape. As liberation became imminent, she was forced to endure one of the Death Marches – 800 kilometres on foot ending in Czechoslovakia. It was there that she was freed by the Russians in 1945.

Sam Litvack, Leon’s father, also came from Radom. When the Germans marched in, he was also placed in one of the ghettos, along with his two brothers. The three were deported through a series of seven labour camps, ending up in Mauthausen. Anticipating the Americans’ arrival, the Germans decided to herd the prisoners into one of the huge underground caverns the prisoners themselves had built for the storage of munitions, shoot them and seal the opening in a vain attempt to destroy the evidence of their activities. Somehow, the prisoners managed to resist and most survived.

After the war Pola returned to Poland but found none of her family. Eventually she ended up in Canada, where she met Sam, and they were married. Like many Holocaust survivors, they had each found a partner who could comprehend what had happened to them. Their shared experience of pain and suffering was also a source of comfort.

After bearing two stillborn children, Pola and Sam adopted Leon at birth in 1960. Leon was a prized possession – a gift from God. As such he was cherished and loved, and constantly reminded of his good fortune compared with their deprivation. Leon was intensely aware, from his earliest memories, of his parents’ suffering. He was brought up in the Jewish faith and culture, of which the legacy of the Holocaust was a huge part. The Holocaust was an ever-present reality. According to Leon, pain and loss became central components of his identity and he developed added strength to try harder and do well.

As parents of an adolescent, Pola and Sam took great interest in their son’s life. They were more worried, more prohibiting and more careful than non-survivor parents. Leon suggests that his mother’s intense interest in him growing up was influenced by the deprivation of her own adolescence; through him Pola enjoyed years that were lost to her.

Leon came from Canada to Northern Ireland in the 1990s and still lives there. He considers that, compared to other countries, the impact of the Holocaust on the national psyche in Ireland has been slight. However, it remains a large part of his own life.

I have discovered in recent years that my mother dealt very well with death. I think it was because she had seen so much of it – primarily during the war, when her own mother was shot before her, and then with the deaths of many of her elderly friends and family. There was passionate involvement and commitment in every area of my life, but it was just a wee bit out of proportion. As my mother aged, I had an intense desire to protect her from a complex world that looks for the quick fix, the easy solution, but it was just not that simple. Yes, the Holocaust has had a lasting effect on me, but growing up with survivors was not bad: it was powerful, zestful, never indifferent, and our family home was always filled with love.

Dr Leon Litvack is Reader in Victorian Studies at Queen’s University, Belfast

Dr Leon Litvack
Ana Loane

Among the hundreds of thousands of central Europeans to have made their homes in Ireland in recent years is Ana Loane from Croatia. She arrived here in 1986. Ana is a primary school teacher. She is married to David and has three children. Ana’s mother, Dragica, still lives in Croatia, in a little coastal town called Selce, which keeps Ana constantly in touch with her native homeland. They both still share memories of how her grandfather, uncle and aunt disappeared in the notorious Jasenovac concentration camp.

During World War II, Croatia was ruled by the Ustaše, an extreme nationalist group set up as a puppet administration by the Nazis, who had occupied and divided Yugoslavia. With Nazi support, the Ustaše rounded up Jews, Gypsies and Serbs. At Jasenovac, the largest of the Ustaše concentration camps, more than half a million people perished.

Ana’s family came from Lika. Her grandfather, Jure Mataija, was a forest ranger and the family had a comfortable, respectable lifestyle. One night in 1944, during the last roundup of enemies of the régime, the Ustaše arrived and took Jure and Ana’s aunt, Ankica, from the house. Soon afterwards, Ana’s uncle, Ivica, was taken from his position in the regular Croatian army straight to Jasenovac. Ivica had a Serbian girlfriend, a teacher in the local school. It is probable that it was for this association that he was arrested. The records of Jasenovac indicate that all three were killed shortly before the liberation, when the Ustaše shot hundreds of prisoners in an effort to destroy those who could testify against them and to conceal the evidence of their crimes. Before his death Ivica found a sympathetic guard and was able to send home a gold ring, which is still in the family’s possession.

Ana’s mother, Dragica, who was born in 1936, was much younger than her siblings. She and her mother were left without means and forced to become unwelcome house guests on the farm of Jure’s parents. Dragica grew up sharing a small attic room with no toilet.

Eventually, Dragica became a teacher, married a fellow teacher and moved to a village near Zagreb. She was then able to give her own mother a better standard of living, but Ana’s grandmother was never able to come to terms with her loss. She made several attempts to take her life in her old age. Dragica, too, was deeply affected by what had happened. At the age of 70 she decided, with her husband and Ana, to visit Jasenovac. As a way of confronting the past, Dragica had the names of her father, brother and sister added to her mother’s gravestone.

The conflict of the World War II remains a sensitive subject in the former Yugoslavia, where the wounds of the ethnic conflict of the 1990s still fester. In Ireland, however, Ana commemorates her family’s tragedy with her own children and in her work as a teacher. Her own story, it is hoped, will make the legacy of the Holocaust more significant for the children of today.

It was only last summer that my mother had the courage and strength enough to face a visit to Jasenovac, an immensely sad and depressing place. After so many years of not knowing what really happened, we were faced with a cruel truth – that her father, brother and sister were all executed just months before the liberation. All that was left were their names written on the glass panels of the memorial building and noted in records, among hundreds of thousands of other innocent people who suffered the same horrific destiny.

I cannot describe the intensity of emotions we experienced looking at their names and details, imagining how they must have felt facing death and suffering, being separated and taken away from their loved ones. The years without them unwound in my mother’s head and she remembered how her own mother had continued to live only because the only child she had left needed her. My grandmother passed away when she was just 64. My mother always believed that it was her own tragedy that weakened her body and extinguished her light.

I know that all the families of Holocaust victims have their own unbearably tragic stories to tell. I also feel we are all connected by the legacy of that awful time, by the same pain.
Young people from Poland

Poland and Ireland are located 2,000 miles apart, on opposite edges of Europe. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Europe is united and many Poles have settled here in Ireland. However, in 1939–1945 our countries were very much more distant. When Poland was being torn apart by war, Ireland remained neutral and there was little exchange of information.

The Second World War and the Nazi Holocaust are often acknowledged as the most horrifying events that ever happened to humanity. However, Polish people’s knowledge of the war and their attitudes to it differ very much from those of the Irish. Even though the young Polish people living in Ireland today are the third or the fourth generation since the war, the knowledge of it has been imprinted in their minds. The memory of the destruction and the genocide is built into their sense of national identity. They say: We remember a war that destroyed Poland on many levels. Entire cities, towns and villages were levelled. Two million Poles were murdered by the Nazis. The genocide of the European Jews took place to a large extent in camps located on Polish soil.

Before the war, Jews comprised ten per cent of the Polish population. They contributed hugely to society. Poems by Tuwim or Brzechwa were known to every child. Families of Christian and Jewish cultures had lived side by side for centuries.

As part of the effort to eliminate the Jewish population in Poland, the Nazis made and enforced a law saying that all household members would be punished by death if a Jew was found concealed in their home or on their property. Nonetheless, many risked their lives.

Mariusz Dzieglewski is a sociology lecturer who has lived in Dublin for three years. He comes from Lublin, close to where the Majdanek concentration camp was located. He recollects: I visited it first when I was fourteen on a school excursion. I came back afterwards many times. I think that Polish people grow up in the shadow of this history and only recently have discussed what really happened. Mariusz remembers hearing stories about Lublin from before the war, about Polish and Jewish children playing together and children being sent to the Jewish shops because goods were cheaper there. Lublin was a very multicultural city then. It cannot be said that the Jews were integrated into the local community but they coexisted.

The passage of time reveals more stories that seem to challenge the black-and-white image from our childhood of who was to blame. Books such as Jan Tomasz Gross’s Neighbours (2000) tell stories of Polish people during the war and shortly afterwards taking part in pogroms with the Germans or on their own initiative. It is difficult to come to terms with these facts.

Anna Paś, who has been in Dublin for three years, says: When I read those books I was shocked and I felt ashamed of what happened. The new facts make the picture very confusing. I cannot say now which behaviour dominated among the Polish, what our role was in the Holocaust. Is it just more comfortable not to question it?

Martyna Klonica studies and works in Ireland. The neighbours of her great-grandparents succeeded in hiding a Jewish girl for six years in the attic during the war. People in the town knew where some Jews were hidden. My grandfather knew as well, but he often said that he would prefer not to because when the Germans were coming to the house they gave an ultimatum: ‘Give me one address where Jews are hidden. Otherwise, I will kill somebody from your family.’ He had no choice. But he never told about that little Jewish girl next door. She survived and after the war she was adopted.’

Bartłomiej Brużewicz, a liberal participant in the Polish Forum in Ireland, who is equally interested in the issue, comments: Certainly Gross’s books give us cause for reflection on the role of Poles in the Holocaust. Unfortunately there are very few historic sources that unequivocally reveal what happened. However, Polish people were helping Jews even though one could be shot on the street for just talking to a Jew. In fact, Polish citizens have the highest number of Righteous in the world. More than 6,000 Poles out of approximately 24,000 people worldwide have been recognised as the Righteous Among the Nations. The award is granted by the state of Israel to honour non-Jews who protected Jews during the Holocaust, at the risk of their own lives.

Time moves on, memory fades and the people who witnessed the events of the Second World War are passing away. For the young Polish people in Ireland it is important to know the truth, to deal with issues of guilt, blame and forgiveness and to educate about it in the proper way. Forgetting about it means losing our national identity and a nation without an identity loses its life.
I am 27-year-old Polish woman, born in a small town of Ciechanow, which used to be a thriving capital of the North Mazovia region, central Poland. Now the town is silent, as if constantly asleep. The oldest photographs of my town, from the 1920s, show the place full of life. For centuries its population consisted of Poles, Jews and Germans, mixed together. In the 19th century, due to the move of the Jewish population from the countryside to the towns, more than 60% of the inhabitants of the town were Jewish.

In 1940 the ghetto was formed. Between 1941 and 1942 all Ciechanow’s Jews were deported to other towns, and ultimately to Auschwitz. There are no marks on the skin of the contemporary town left by its Jewish history. The synagogue is destroyed, the cemetery was devastated in 1940 and hardly anyone knows now where it used to be located.

My grandmother remembered two communities, Polish and Jewish, coexisting one alongside the other. One long winter evening, I asked her to share her memories with me. She told me she remembered Jews, owners of most of the shops in the city. She also remembered that she deeply disliked Jews, believed that they were close-minded and greedy. I listened to her and wondered, how is it even possible that with so much accessible education and information, after surviving the reality of World War II (she was 11 at the time of its outbreak), she is antisemetic? I couldn’t understand it, and it kept haunting me for years. Luckily, at that point I knew enough to recognise an antisemetic remark. My own grandmother made me feel extremely uncomfortable.

When one goes through the education system and education programmes in Poland, one has to endure a thorough year of difficult Holocaust and Soviet literature. We learn about it as we grow. We read about concentration camps. We read stories of survivors, stories of Righteous and informers. We learn about opportunism, and what it meant to be heroic. We read about the liquidation of ghettos, gas chambers, stories of journeys, segregation, inhuman conditions in which people lived, worked and died. Most of us make our first visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau as teenagers; some come back several times. We also read about camps in Siberia, and some of the stories require very long digesting processes...

Remaining antisemetic or racist with this amount of information theoretically seems impossible. Practically, as I learned to my surprise, even those who survived the war might still keep their minds poisoned. The education I went through gave me the skills to resist, and a thick skin, and I am grateful for that. I believe that knowledge and understanding are the only ways to defend tolerance, and that this has to be exercised every day, in every situation, even in the intimacy of my own family.

Chasing shadows – connections...

I entered university in Krakow. I studied sociology and anthropology of culture. Some questions have followed me from there. How deeply are our beliefs rooted? Are we racist even if we don’t realise it? Who is the right one to judge?

For one of my classes, I was asked to prepare a short interview with someone that remembered the Jewish and Polish communities existing together, having a great influence on the commerce, arts, and politics of the country. The person I interviewed was an older lady, who remembered distinctly the moment of the liquidation of Krakow’s ghetto. People packed in the animal transportation wagons, or simply shot on the street. Her story was sad.

Some other stories were humorous, reflecting daily life. The story of some mischevious Polish children trying to tease a religious Jew into abandoning his practices proved to be remarkably popular within our group. People laughed, but there was a indescribable tension, just right under the surface of the smile. Emotions were touched. Connection was made. Places became alive once more. We could see people from those stories, laughing, talking, arguing. They were just right there, centimetres away; you could almost hear them. Hidden as if behind the curtain. You will raise the corner and the world of shadows will come out, uncovered, the world that once existed, so close yet fading away so fast...
In 2004, I checked the news. Jewish chemist, Aaron Ciechanover, was awarded a Nobel prize in chemistry. Without much hesitation, I looked online for his email address. I congratulated him (the only one time in my life I had an opportunity to congratulate a Nobel Prize winner! (I still recall my arrogance with a smile.) I asked if there was any connection between his surname and my hometown, Ciechanow. His reply came after one day. His family had to flee from the town, and they took up the name of the town as a mark, to remember. He had never been there. He was happy to hear from me; I was so happy to hear from him. The connection was made. The memories were alive.

We can almost touch them now. We can see them, as they lived there, as they left. Those memories are so precious. Places are filled with them. Poland has a distinctive mark. So many of them existed so close to many of us. It is truly so easy to make a connection, and bring the relation back to life, and it can bring consolation, understanding, some form of happiness.

Since 2004 Aaron Ciechanover has visited the town of Ciechanow. I haven’t been there, I haven’t met him, but I feel warm and happy when I think about his travel.

Yanky Fachler

I moved to Ireland eleven years ago after living in Israel for 25 years. I have been associated with Ireland’s Holocaust Memorial Day committee since its inception, and it has been my privilege to preside over the annual event since the first HMD event in January 2003.

My father’s parents were Polish Jews who lived in Berlin, where my father was born in 1923. He lost his parents in the Holocaust, as well as dozens of other family members including his grandparents. As teenagers, both my parents miraculously escaped from Nazi Germany – my father with the Kindertransport, and my mother with her whole family.

My mother and father arrived separately in England. They met during World War II, and married in December 1944. On their wedding day, my father did not know whether his parents were alive or dead. To this day, nothing is known about the date, place or manner of their deaths at the hands of the Nazis. I have written a book about my parents, The Vow: Rebuilding the Fachler Tribe after the Holocaust.

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland and the HMD committee are doing sacred work in perpetuating the memory of those who perished, and above all educating the new generations. We owe it to our murdered brethren to ensure that such a monstrous crime will never be permitted to happen again.

Yanky is a corporate trainer and author, and lives in Dundalk
**Moti and Riva Neuman**

In July 2001 we moved from Israel to Dublin, where Moti is involved in the high-tech business.

We are enjoying the local culture and people and have become part of the Irish Jewish community, where we try to help and contribute whenever it is needed.

As second generation to Holocaust survivors we grew up surrounded by the Shoah from a very early age. A lot has been written about the “second generation” and all is true – this is us! Like a lot of our friends, we grew up missing a large part of our family and for a long time we thought that it was normal not to have grandparents, aunts and uncles. As time passes by, it is not getting easier and we carry our parents’ pain in our hearts to the point that we almost feel like we are Holocaust survivors ourselves.

The Holocaust is an inseparable part of our lives and has definitely affected our view of life, our identity and goals as individuals and as a part of the Jewish nation.

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**Vered Zur**

My husband, Boaz, and I came from Israel to Ireland seven years ago with our four children. We are settled in Kilkenny and have many friends. Boaz holds a degree in Special Education and also works as a complementary therapist. My degree is in Education and I am working for my Masters. We have been living and working in one of the Camphill Communities in Co Kilkenny, and we have found that this environment heightens our own children’s awareness and sensitivity towards people generally, and towards people with special needs in particular.

A few years ago my father started to do research about his family and to write about it. His family came from Thessaloniki in Greece. They were a big family, only one of whom managed to escape from the Holocaust – that was my grandfather. It was hard for him to talk about his family. My father is the only child of my grandparents and, just before the death of his father, he got some information about the family. When my father came to visit us in Ireland he brought along his research. The story is heartbreaking – the family ended their lives in the concentration camps.

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*The message must go out loud and clear: there can be no place for racism in Ireland. Occasions such as this evening powerfully reinforce that message. They strengthen our resolve to work together to build inclusive communities which embrace diversity.*

_Taoiseach Bertie Ahern,
Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2005_
Somebody Has Survived

I cannot see their faces
I never had a chance
I never met them
but have seen them on the old photograph
There was no time to know what they were really like.

I cannot see their faces
And what way it was for them
not knowing what happened to their children.

I cannot see their faces
Their blue eyes and unusual accents
But I have seen it in their child.

I cannot see their faces
I cannot imagine their horror
knowing that that was it
and they were going to disappear
In dust over the Polish land!
The only reminder is one old photograph,
I and the memorial plaque but
No headstone and no grave
because they disappeared in dust.
It is so painful to imagine
that there was no humanity
During that time!

I cannot see their faces
But I wish to feel their spirits
around to let them know that someone has survived
And the legacy of that time is passed and will survive
In generations to come!

In memory of my Rosenthal grandparents and the six million others who perished.

by Renata Katz

Originally from Czechoslovakia, Renata has lived in Dublin for 29 years.
The Crocus Project – Responses

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland invites school children to plant yellow crocuses in memory of one and a half million Jewish children and thousands of other children who were murdered during the Holocaust. The yellow flowers recall the yellow star all Jews were forced to wear under Nazi rule and the project serves as a conduit for teaching young children about the Holocaust. The children’s involvement in planting the bulbs and watching the flowers grow, encourages discussion and ongoing learning about tolerance and respect.

The project is now in its third year and 17,000 schoolchildren throughout the island of Ireland planted crocuses in 2008. Also this year, 1,875 pupils from overseas have become involved. The project is becoming a perennial activity and it is hoped the numbers of schools in Ireland and abroad will increase over the years. In 2009, the Trust will be launching an online crocus forum, which will connect participants in The Crocus Project all over the world.

Students work from Kilbeg National School, Co Meath

The Crocus Project is a wonderful initiative. Continued success. What a wonderful world it would be if our differences made no difference.

Maureen Fanning, Kilbeg National School, Co Meath

We would love to take part again this year please. We think it is a very worthwhile project.

Amanda Coleman, St Laurence’s NS, Dublin

We took part in The Crocus Project this year and the children have enjoyed and benefitted from it immensely and we would love to be included in future projects.

Nuala Costello, St Laurence’s NS, Co Kildare
Holocaust Memorial Day 2009

St Columba’s CS, Glenties, Co Donegal

Presentation Secondary School, Waterford

Meliha School, Malta

Students in Poland planting crocuses

Scoil Mhuire, Ballymore Eustace, Co Kildare

Luqa Primary School, Malta

Scoil Naomh Eirc, Ardfort, Co Kerry

Limerick School Project, Co Limerick

Students in Poland planting crocuses

John Shelton School, Coventry, UK

Students in Poland planting crocuses

Whitwell Middle School, Tennessee, USA

Holocaust survivor Tomi Reichental with pupils at St Catherine’s NS, Dublin

Shinna Integrated College, Northern Ireland with visitors from Utrecht, Holland

Students in Poland planting crocuses

Students in Poland planting crocuses

Students in Israel planting crocuses

Ardcoil Rath Iomghain, Rathangan, Co Kildare
The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland arranges for Holocaust survivors to visit schools and provides guidelines for the organisers. Hearing survivors speak about their personal experiences is a most effective way to prompt discussions and activities about the Holocaust and to consider antisemitism and other forms of racism, intolerance and genocide.

Students’ encounters with Holocaust survivors lead to a greater awareness about the dangers of discrimination and facilitate learning lessons that are relevant to their own generation. After hearing Holocaust survivors speak, the Trust encourages schools to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.

“Listening to Zoltan was inspirational and moving, I felt privileged to hear his story and learn how he has managed to confront his past and build a happy life for himself.”

Ciara Buckley

“Hearing Zoltan’s story really opened my eyes to the horrors of the Holocaust, and has taught me that we all have choices in life as to whether or not we become victims or survivors to whatever life throws our way.”

Jane-Ann Foley

“It was humbling to hear Zoltan talk with such honesty and dignity. To be in the presence of a Holocaust survivor was a unique experience, that will not be possible for future generations, we need to remember and honour the past.”

Sinead English

Students’ responses to hearing a Holocaust survivor’s testimony
Responses to teachers’ education programmes

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland runs two programmes specifically for teachers. *Learning from the Holocaust* is a five-day programme that includes a 3-day study visit to Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau supported by two separate seminar days before and after the visit. The programme is designed to give teachers an understanding of the Holocaust and the history of the Jews of Europe up to the Second World War. It provides participants with the skills to address Holocaust awareness with their students.

*Teaching the Holocaust* is an intensive Summer course for teachers that provides in-depth information about the Holocaust and how to teach the complex subject in the classroom. It addresses cross-curricular approaches and considers where Holocaust Studies have relevance for our students today.

…Well, I am back in my office on this lovely Monday morning, basking in the warm afterglow of a successful trip to beautiful Ireland. I cannot tell you how much I appreciated all your efforts to make the teacher training program such a resounding success. You have a seemingly endless reservoir of energy and all your work is so thorough and clear. It was a true pleasure to work with you on the program and I hope that we continue to work together to create additional programs for Irish educators. Any help I can offer will be happily and freely given.

Stephen Feinberg, Director,
National Outreach for Teacher Initiatives
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

…I have been Holocaust obsessed since the course and have spent a fortune on Amazon buying texts and DVDs. I found out last week that I have all of Transition Year in Belvedere this year so I am going to do a course on genocide focusing particularly on the Holocaust. Will be in touch regarding memorial day.

…Once again, I want to thank you for all the enormous work you obviously put in to organising the course this summer. You have made an extraordinary difference to the level of awareness the people of this country have on the Holocaust because now you have 32 people to bring the message out to the wider community. You should be very proud of yourself for the justice you have done to the memory of the victims.

Poland was a pivotal experience in my life. Spending two days in the Kazimierz district, meeting the Righteous, and finally Auschwitz-Birkenau, made an indelible impression that I will reflect on for the rest of my life.

…Thank you so much for the experience of teaching the Holocaust. It was a hugely beneficial and challenging experience and so worthwhile. It really opened my eyes and taught me so much. I feel truly privileged to have participated in the course. Thank you for such a positive learning experience.

“Having attended in-service training over the years, I have never experienced anything that comes close to the standard of excellence I have experienced on this programme.”

“Best course I have ever experienced.”

“Great course, very interesting and excellent presenters and lecturers.”

“Surpassed my expectations, absolutely brilliant.”

“The course was hugely informative and very intense. I’m delighted to have been here and to have received so much knowledge to think about.”

“Thought provoking, cannot say enough about it. Makes me want to learn and teach more on the topic. Really excellent.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Place of Death</th>
<th>Year of Death</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tr>
<td>Max Heller</td>
<td>Chomotow, Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>Auschwitz 1943</td>
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<td>Klara Heller</td>
<td>Hermanstat, Czechoslovakia</td>
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<td>Gisella Molnar</td>
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<td>Saloman Delmonte</td>
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<td>Karoline Wolff</td>
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<td>Martin Wolff</td>
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<td>Wolfgang Wolff</td>
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<td>Tauba Laufer</td>
<td>Lodz, Poland</td>
<td>Chelmno 1944</td>
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</table>
We Remember…

- Szmyrly Laufer, Born Wislica, Poland, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 41 Years
- Matla Laufer, Born Gwarczow, Poland, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 32 Years
- Tauba Hinda Laufer, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 13 Years
- Szymuel Alter, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 11 Years
- Pivcia Laja, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 4 Years
- Roza Bluma Laufer, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Chelmno 1944, Aged 31 Years
- Hersz Machel Laufer, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Lodz, Poland 1938, Aged 17 Years
- Chana Zlata Laufer, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Chelmno 1944, Aged 21 Years
- Sucher Ber, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Chelmno 1944, Aged 19 Years
- Malka Laufer, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Chelmno 1944, Aged 18 Years
- Szyfra Laufer, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Chelmno 1944, Aged 14 Years
- Alter Itzinger, Born Lodz, Poland, Died Auschwitz 1944
- Rosalia Scheimovitz, Born Slovakia, Died Bergen-Belsen 1945, Aged 76 Years
- Julius Mayer, Born Slovakia, Died Buchenwald 1945, Aged 50 Years
- Gejza Suri, Born Slovakia, Died Buchenwald 1944, Aged 46 Years
- Oskar Scheimovitz, Born Slovakia, Died Buchenwald 1944, Aged 39 Years
- Adela Fried, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 45 Years
- Bella Fried, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1944
- Katerina Fried, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 16 Years
- Agnes Fried, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1944, Aged 10 Years
- Ezekiel Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Katarina Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Kalmar Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Ilona Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Gita Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Ibi Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Desider Reichental, Born Slovakia, Died Wroclaw 1943, Aged 33 Years
- Ferdinand Alt, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Renka Alt, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Erna Elbert, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Marta Elbert, Born Slovakia, Died Auschwitz 1942
- Ephraim Nayman, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Uzbekistan 1941, Aged 5 Years
- Zvi Nayman, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Uzbekistan 1941, Aged 3 Years
- Chaya Zelcer, Born Ostrov Mazovietck, Poland, Died Poland 1940–41, Aged 50 Years
- Israel Zelcer, Born Ostrov Mazovietck, Poland, Died Poland 1940–41, Aged 50 Years
- 5 Zelcer Children, Born Ostrov Mazovietck, Poland, Died Zambrov, Poland 1940–41
- Royze Centnershver, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Shendova 1940–41, Aged 45 Years
- Moshe Centnershver, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Shendova 1940–41, Aged 45 Years
- 6 Centnershver Children, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Shendova 1940–41, Aged 45 Years
- Fishel Bernholtz, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Majdanek, Poland 1940–41, Aged 48 Years
- Mrs Bernholtz, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Majdanek, Poland 1940–41, Aged 48 Years
- Bernholtz Children, Born Dlogoshodle, Poland, Died Majdanek, Poland 1940–41, Aged 48 Years
- Lable Nayman, Born Vishkof, Poland
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<td>Lea Lycho Smaiovitich</td>
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<td>Devora Smaiovitich</td>
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<td>Miriam Pollak</td>
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<td>Doyetch Blimi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jure Mataija</td>
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<td>Ivica Mataija</td>
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<td>Kalman Rosenthal</td>
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<td>Abraham Soustiel</td>
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<td>Rapae Soustiel</td>
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### We Remember…

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<td>Emanuel Brudo</td>
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<td>Soustiel Children</td>
<td>Czernovitz, Austria</td>
<td>Riga, Latvia 1941</td>
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<td>Wien, Austria</td>
<td>Riga, Latvia 1941</td>
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<td>Iiza, Latvia 1941</td>
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<td>Peppi Grzyp</td>
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<td>Chaya Milechman</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
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Six million Jews perished in the Holocaust as well as millions of others, annihilated because of their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or political affiliations. It is important that we cherish their memory, remember their sacrifice and commit ourselves to teaching lessons about the Holocaust that are relevant to our lives today. This is particularly true when confronting the problems of racism in general and of antisemitism in particular.

Brian Lenihan TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, January 2008
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 the Holocaust.

Victim Groups

**DISABLED VICTIMS:**
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 Gene Lambert, *National Disability Authority*

**GYPSIES:**
In memory of the Roma and Sinti people who were disenfranchised, persecuted and murdered

*Candle-lighters:* Jon Zatreanu and George Dancea, *Roma Support Group, Ireland*

**HOMOSEXUALS:**
In memory of the homosexual men and women who were persecuted and murdered because of their sexual orientation

*Candle-lighters:* Michael Finlay and Marie Mulholland

**POLISH and ETHNIC MINORITIES:**
In memory of Black people, Poles, Slavs and other ethnic minorities who were persecuted and murdered

*Candle-lighters:* Artur Tyszkiewicz from Poland and Thabi Madide, *Comhlámh*

**POLITICAL VICTIMS:**
In memory of the political opponents of the Nazis – Socialists, Communists, Trade Unionists, Democrats, Masonic organisations and other anti-Nazi victim groups

*Candle-lighters:* Peter Cassells, former General Secretary of *ICTU* and Kim Bielenberg

**CHRISTIAN VICTIMS:**
In memory of the Christian victims of all denominations who were persecuted and murdered, many of whom saved and sheltered Jews

*Candle-lighters:* Sister Carmel Niland Member of the Council of Christians and Jews and the Three Faiths Forum and Rev. Sheila Zietsman, chaplain of East Glendalough School

**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 exterminated in gas chambers, death camps and concentration camps; Jews perished in the ghettos; Jews died of starvation and disease; Jews were shot in the forests and Jews were murdered in the streets and in their homes.

*Candle-lighters:* These candle-lighters are children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors living in Ireland

Riva Neuman, whose mother survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and

Moti Neuman, whose parents survived camps in Siberia and the massacre in Bronica forest

Emma Zinn-Collis, whose father, Zoltan, survived Bergen-Belsen concentration camp

David Phillips, whose father, Geoffrey, escaped to England with the Kindertransports

Sharlette Caplin, whose late father, Raphael Urbach, survived Buchenwald and Theresienstadt

Rita Evrony, wife of Israel’s ambassador to Ireland, whose father, Leo Loeffer, survived Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald
The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland educates and informs about the Holocaust in order to address antisemitism and all forms of racism and intolerance in Ireland.

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland is an independent non-profit national charity. Supporting the work of the Trust provides an opportunity to establish an enduring legacy in honour of the millions who perished in the Holocaust. Through education, the Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland promotes a positive approach to tolerance and diversity.

HETI designs educational programmes and cultural projects for all levels of education and for the general public.

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- The Crocus Project
- Survivors’ testimony
- School visits to centres of Holocaust education
- Teachers’ Programmes
- Research
- Arts & Culture
- Exhibitions

Clifton House, Lower Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin 2.
Telephone: +353-1-669 0593   Email: info@hetireland.org   www.holocausteducationaltrustireland.org
Sources, References, Bibliography

Bibliography

O’Reilly, Terence, *Hitler’s Irishmen* (Cork, 2008).

Articles and Other Documents

O’Connor, John, ‘City Mourns Death of Brother Columbanus Deegan’, *Munster Express* (20 July 2007).
O’Donohue, David, ‘Hitler’s Strange Bunch of Spies’, *Sunday Business Post* (1 December 2002).
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Michael Falk: Art Song Chronicles, GINA Gallery of International Naïve Art, 255 Dizengoff Street, Tel Aviv 63117, Israel, June 2004.
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Millisle: internet.
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Tomi Reichental: private collection.
Yanky Fachler: private collection.
Vered Zur: private collection.

Radio/Television Programmes and Films

Blind Eye (Blue Egg Productions, 2007), Ireland’s Nazis (RTÉ 1, 2007), The Tubridy Show (RTÉ Radio 1, 4 June 2007), The Scarlet and the Black (ITC Entertainment Productions, 1983).

Websites

HONOURED GUESTS

Mrs Suzi Diamond – Bergen-Belsen
Mr Jan Kaminski – Poland
Mr Geoffrey Phillips – Kindertransport
Mrs Inge Radford – Austria
Mr Tomi Reichental – Bergen-Belsen
Mrs Doris Segal – Sudetenland
Mrs Rosel Siev – Aurich, Germany
Mr Zoltan Zinn-Collis – Bergen-Belsen
Ms Edit Zinn-Collis – Bergen-Belsen

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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC

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The Jewish Representative Council of Ireland
The Sisters of Sion
The Council for Christians and Jews

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Voice: Moya Brennan   Piper: Mikey Smith

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Printing: Print Bureau, Inchicore, Dublin 8   Design: Siobhán O Reilly, Print Bureau
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.*