

Remembering

On Monday we marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day with a ceremony at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi German concentration camp in Poland, attended by world leaders including His Majesty King Charles III, President Macron of France and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine. Despite the camp being liberated by the Red Army in 1945, Russia was not invited to the ceremony because of its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Some 1.1 million people were exterminated in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex between 1942 and 1945, of whom 960,000 were Jews. Of these, 865,000 were gassed as soon as they arrived. Auschwitz was a major part of Germany's "final solution" of what it saw as its Jewish problem that saw the extermination of nearly six million Jews in death camps. Most were gassed. Some were shot. All were killed because they were Jews, and for no other reason. Today we call this the Holocaust. Every year we commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The small number of people who survived tell their stories of the camps. The numbers get fewer every year as survivors pass away. There were only fifty there this year, the 80th anniversary of the camp's liberation.

Every year, the Holocaust Educational Trust organises school visits to the camp. It is a very powerful message and those who have been are unlikely ever to forget the experience. Media personnel are also invited, including *Education Journal* which reported extensively on our visit more than a decade ago. Holocaust survivors also visit schools and talk about their experiences.

It is fortunate that Auschwitz-Birkenau was captured intact and a museum was established soon after the War. It is within reach of much of Europe and many children have been able to visit. The aim is to ensure that we never forget, and never repeat the unbelievable barbarity that Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other camps turned into an every day occurrence. As one survivor put it at the Remembrance Day event on Monday, she thought it incredible that in what she thought of as a major centre of European culture and science such an obscene event had become ordinary. Antisemitism was well known in Germany long before the extermination camps, for the roots of what happened in the camps go back many years before they were built. The casual antisemitism was open and virtually unchallenged in Germany, and other countries, long before the War.

In her book *Travellers in the Third Reich. The Rise of Fascism Through the Eyes of Everyday People*, the writer Julia Boyd uses a range of original source documents including letters home from tourists, to show what ordinary people thought in the inter-war years. Antisemitism was widespread and open in Germany, and quite a few of the British and American tourists who wrote home about it rather approved.

The first genocide of the 20th century was not the Holocaust. It was the mass murder of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks during the First World War. Just like the Wannsee conference of 1942, at which senior Nazis planned the Holocaust, so the Turks held a similar conference in Constantinople in 1916/17 to plan the extermination of the Armenians. Over a million died in the forced marches to the Syrian desert or were shot out of hand and their property looted. Despite their attempts at secrecy, there were 194 articles about it in the *New York Times* while the American Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, published *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, a best selling book on it. The British Government had published a massive Command Paper, *The Treatment of Armenians In the Ottoman Empire: 1915-16*, Cd. 8236, running to nearly 700 pages, in 1916. Yet to this day the Turks deny that the genocide ever happened. The evidence that it did has always been in the Turkish Military Archives. Vahakn Dadrian and Taner Akcam published *Judgement at Istanbul* based on the archives in 2008 (and 2011 in English translation).

When some of his generals objected to the Holocaust on the grounds of the repercussions, Hitler is said to have dismissed their fears by saying: "Who remembers the Armenians now?" Whether Hitler ever did say it has been questioned, but the lessons of the Armenian genocide were not learned. From 1933 to 1936, Stalin murdered three million Ukrainians by starvation. Between 1933 and 1945 Stalin and Hitler murdered 14 million people, none of whom were war casualties. Timothy Snyder's chilling *Bloodlands. Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (2010) goes into excruciating detail. The number of genocides since is almost endless: Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan. All are well documented. We have not learned the lessons and even today we see civilians killed in the Middle East. Without doubt, as the number of witnesses to the Holocaust dwindles learning from their testimony is as necessary now as it ever was.