**Camp 191** **Crewe Hall, Stowford, Crewe, Cheshire**

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| **Prisoner of War Camps (1939 – 1948) - Project report by Roger J.C. Thomas - English Heritage 2003** | | | | | | | |
| OS NGR | Sheet | No. | Name & Location | County | Cond’n | Type 1945 | Comments |
| SJ 732 538 | 118 | 191 | Crewe Hall, Stowford, Crewe | Cheshire | 4 | Base Camp | Restored parkland and a works occupy the site today |

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| **Location:** Crewe Hall is a [Jacobean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobean_architecture) mansion located east of [Crewe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crewe).  **Before the camp:** Country estate and hall, the seat of various branches of the Crewe family until 1936, when the land was sold to the [Duchy of Lancaster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Lancaster). Requisitioned by the army. Camp used by US troops prior to D-day.  **Pow Camp: C**amp converted with barbed wire fences, watchtowers and lighting – despite this the grounds, gardens and lakes were regarded as very pleasant. Camp for German officers. 1945 1,400 pows. I have seen references to Italian pows being held here, but not yet seen any evidence. It may be that Italian pows helped to adapt the camp prior to use, this happened elsewhere, or, it may be that there were some Italian officers held with the Germans?  Account by Dorothy Meredith, daughter of the Head Clerk who worked at Crew Hall:  “…*I think it would be early in 1940 when the Army requisitioned the Hall… The land immediately surrounding the Hall was covered in Nissen huts and several large buildings, one of which was a NAAFI Canteen….”* She remembered Scottish soldiers, the Cambridgeshire Regiment, and then the American Army came, “*first a detachment of all white men, and when they moved on, they were followed by an all-black regiment*.” [Does anyone have name of units and dates?]  “*As the war progressed the troops moved to the south, preparing the way for the D-Day Landings and Crewe Hall was converted into a Prison Camp for German Officers. A large wire perimeter fence was constructed with watchtowers and sentry posts. On most afternoons squads of about fifty prisoners were taken on marches around the lanes. They always looked rather sad in the long grey overcoats and peaked hats. As the war was ending, the prisoners went out each day working on* *local farms* |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1954 |

*without guards. The Officer in Command when the Hall was a POW Camp was Lord Napier of Ettrick, a Scottish nobleman. I think he must have been a rather eccentric and very amusing man. At the lakeside of the Hall there were two large stone lions on the terrace. One day, Lord Napier telephoned the Estate Office to ask if he might have permission to have these lions removed to the front of the Hall, which was used as a parade ground. He said he wanted them “to growl at the Germans.” I think they have since been put back on their plinths.*” (From the Crewe and District Local History Association journal, Issue 28, Winter/Spring 2017). No mention of Italians.

Though there are no dates, from the account above, it would seem the pow camp opened in 1944 after D-Day – but, other accounts state 1943.

**13 / 15 October 1945.** Visit by Mr Miller to inspect English Education. Commandant Lt Col Barling. Strength 1481. None of the pows had been politically screened.

*“This is a special Camp in so far as it is almost exclusively for Officers, who include men especially well qualified to be teachers and who have plenty of time for study, since they are under no obligation to work (though a few have recently gone voluntarily to work on the land, and according to the Lagerfuhrer it has done them a great deal of good to be doing work which they feel to be productive). The curriculum includes a course for hotel waiters and cooks…”*

Major Dr Günther Geissler, a lawyer, commented; “…*what I remember with most pride from Crewe Hall is that for the first time in my life I worked with my hands and completed a baker’s apprenticeship*.” (\*)

There were 688 pupils attending English lessons, a very high number, with 7 pow teachers. The teachers included Dr Curt Sandig, later professor at Heidelberg. He commented on the high quality of toilet paper which was used for note taking until writing paper was supplied by the YMCA. Also, Dr Kurt Blohm, previously lecturer in English at Liverpool University who taught English at the camp.

With a high number of political grade C (‘black’) pows there were unpleasant episodes within the camp, including pows who were not whole-heatedly Nazi being beaten up. The German camp leader was replaced after one such incident. There was a loyal parade on Hitler’s birthday in April 1945.

**5 January 1946.** Mr Miller returned to inspect English Education. He recorded that there were 517 pows studying English; this was a reduction in numbers, but the total number of pows was not given. The number of pow teachers had increased to 14. The pows had not been screened – however, some of the pows were under investigation; e.g. one of the teachers, Wolfgang Brandstetter, had recently been down to the London Cage to be interrogated about his political past.

It seems strange that political screening had still not taken place up to this date, considering the record of troubles here, and when screening had been completed in many other camps.

**23 / 28 March 1946.** Mr P Rossiter visited regarding re-education and with Special Objects:

1. Investigate the report that political pressure still exists in the Camp.

2. Activate re-education.

3. Screen remnants

Strength – 1163 Officers; 246 other ranks – all German.

Commandant: Lt Col Darling. Camp Leader: Oberst Katzmann (B+)

Interpreter: Captain Lyster Deputy C/L: Ott Brankstetter (B-)

German M.O.: St.Arzt. Methke (B-)

A new commandant was expected soon.

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| Screening results: | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | A | B | C | C+ | | 100 | 887 | 410 | 46 | |

The camp was given a grey/black grading overall.

Although English education courses were well-subscribed, re-education activities had barely started. A basic background for this was given.

“*Some months ago the camp was under a Nazi Camp Leader and one of the blackest in the country. PID* [Political Intelligence Department] *then transferred Oberst Katzmann, from 1,* [Grizedale] *who made great progress in at least eliminating Nazi terrorism and also introduced re-education, i.e. lectures by PW on democracy.”*

The Camp Leader was described as co-operative, but not having a very clear idea of what an anti-Nazi is; *“Consequently his selected PW lecturers have been officers like Major Gregor (C) and Major Fischinger (C), who held important jobs under National Socialism, were party members and are now trying not to miss the boat.”* [i.e they were trying to show themselves to be pro-democracy to gain early repatriation].

As a result of these bad selections, genuine anti-Nazis were disgruntled, and redeemable Nazis distrustful.

*“The good cause has been further damaged by Lt.Seidenschrur. The latter caused a healthy stir in the camp by his outspoken leadership of the anti-nazis and for the first time home truths about war guilt and militarism were heard in the camp.”* Unfortunately, he also discredited the anti-Nazi cause by his ‘personal shortcomings’ and involvement in ‘intrigues’ against the Camp Leader. Subsequently he was removed from this camp.

*“The main trouble then is the lack of forceful and respected whites* [political category A pows] *and the intellectual strength of nationalist opportunists. To counteract the politically still very unhealthy and above all unreal atmosphere in the camp (1100 PW proposed sending in a demand for repatriation based on a legally mistaken interpretation of the Geneva convention) the following broad principles were worked out after full discussion with the British staff and the C/L.*

*1. Removal of the influential blacks.* [It was hoped they would be sent to Berechurch Hall Camp 186]

*2. The influence of some effective, forceful and personally respected whites.* [5 pows trained at Wilton Park were selected for this task].

*3. The relegation of turncoat professors and others into non-political jobs and classes.*

*4. An insistence on tolerance…. What was wanted was not a splitting into cliques but a broad platform where opposing views could be stated wholeheartedly but without personal enmity.”* [Discussion meetings with the pows had taken place to begin this process].

Morale was considered to be fairly low with listed negative factors much the same as in other camps:

*a. the uncertainty of their fate (‘Tell us even 3 years but give us a deadline’).*

*b. the news of starvation in Germany*

*c. the fear of Bolshevism in Germany.*

A positive factor in the camp was the possibility of working on the land – 400 pows were doing so, with at least 900 wanting to.

A youth (under-25) problem had been created by distrust of the bogus anti-Nazis. The last contested federal election in Germany had taken place in 1933 – all youth pows would have been too young to vote, and after that only one-party – Nazi - elections were held. One youth pow commented: “*If there was anything better than National Socialism the older men should have known and fought for it. We knew nothing else*.”

Standard re-education activities were being developed:

Newspapers – a wide range of English and some German newspaper were being received. Several French newspapers also arrived.

Library – 2,186 books – 852 in English / 1,185 in German / 149 in French.

Lectures – were occurring regularly. Many were well received, but some pows were resentful about political criticism.

Discussion groups – similar difficulties with weak leadership from genuine democrats.

Films – were well received.

Camp Magazine – ‘*Ans Werk’* (At Work) – “*is above average but suffers from too many heavy, involved cultural essays, too little entertainment and a wishy-washy political line. New people were brought in. Nevertheless, everything could not be achieved in one visit as it is essential to avoid giving the impression of PID direction.”*

Press review – small daily reviews were being held and a larger, weekly review for up to 400 pows.

Other activities –

Religion – “*The protestant priest, Eisenbeiss, is a progressive and stimulating personality: the Catholic priest, Horch, has been graded C+”.* It was recommended that Horch be investigated further.

Education – some of the teaching pows needed to be replaced due to their political views and influence. There were courses in basic school level education, mainly for other ranks, and courses for 40 NCO and army civilian personnel who wished to become civil servants.

Theatre and Music – This was one area seen to be successful. 185 pows active – 15% were professionals. There were theatre, music, variety and choir groups. There was even a record of a circus - presumably one without animals?

Sporting activities, including football and boxing, took place.

Overall the camp was seen as a “*hard nut to crack*” – “*Real progress will only come with the removal of the blacks and the building up of a forceful and honest white leadership*.”

There were some escape attempts. One tunnel was given away by an informer. Lord Napier, the camp commandant inspected the tunnel and commented; “*As your Commandant I must condemn your tunnel; as a Colonel of Pioneers, I must admire its construction*.” He then stated about the pows held responsible for the tunnel; “*I rather like these young fellows for not wanting to be cooped up in this camp.”* (\*)

Camp commandants:

Lieutenant Colonel Barling or Darling.

Lieutenant Colonel William Francis Cyril James Hamilton Napier – Lord Napier and Ettrick, 1900-1954. Originally with the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, eventually serving with the Pioneer Corps. Previously commandant at Castle Rankine Camp (64) Denny, Stirlingshire. Rather eccentric, but accounts show great respect for the man.

Pow Hostel at Warmingham, by Donkinson’s Oak – reported as having Italian pows. Warmingham was subsequently transferred to camps 74 / 147 / 189.

By **October 1946,** Crewe Hall became a satellite Camp for Tarporley Camp 74. There was no increase of pow officers recorded on the strength for Tarporley, so they must have been sent elsewhere. There were no further entries for the camp after this date.

**After the camp:** It was used as offices after the [Second World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_World_War), serving as the headquarters for the [Wellcome Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellcome_Trust" \o "Wellcome Trust) for nearly thirty years. As of 2019, it is used as a hotel, restaurant and health club.

**Further Information:**

National Archives FO 939/178 – 191 Officers Camp, Crewe Hall Camp, Crewe, Cheshire. Dated 1945 – 1946. (Used above).

The German Federal Archives have a copy of the camp magazine.

(\*) Thresholds of Peace – Matthew Barry Sullivan – 1979 – Hamish Hamilton

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There is an entry about a ‘Crewe Hall incident’ in Hansard - **15 June 1948** -Volume 452, Col 26. I think it may refer to the assaults on pows by Nazis within the camp.

*Mr. Stokes asked the Secretary of State for War when it is expected to complete the review of prisoners of war whose sentences will not have been completed by 30th June; and whether any decision has yet been taken with regard to those men serving sentences as a result of the Crewe Hall incident.*

*​*

*Mr. Shinwell - The review of sentences of prisoners of war undergoing imprisonment in the United Kingdom will be completed before the end of repatriation; as regards the second part of the Question I have nothing to add to the letter which I wrote to my hon. Friend on 28th May.*