**Camp 168** **- Brookmill Camp, Woodlands, Kirkham, Lancashire (aka Woodlands)**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Base Camp. 168. Brookmill Camp, Woodlands, Kirkham, Lancs.

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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 |
| SD 42 32 | 102 | 168 | Brookmill Camp, Woodlands, Kirkham, Preston | Lancashire | 5 | Base Camp |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location:** Brook Mill was located on Brook Street in Kirkham, (labelled on an earlier 1911 OS map). I think the camp was based nearby, rather than in the ex-mill – a probable site is shown lower right on the map with NGR SD 420 323. Note, this is across the road from **Woodlands** Avenue.  A memory of Brook Mill from the BBC People’s War project stated; “*I then got a job for several months in Brook Mill, near the railway station, which had earlier been a cotton factory and was now engaged on war work, manufacturing webbing equipment for the army*.” (Alfred Donald Aiken). This would also indicate that the site was near, rather than in, the ex-Mill.  [Incidental – Kirkham was painted by Lowry – ‘A Lancashire Village, 1935’  **Before the camp:** The 1891 Grace’s Guide lists it as a cotton mill belonging to ‘TR & E Harrison with 30,000 spindles, 201/36. Twist, 308/50, weft.’ It is later listed as belonging to Jones, Batford & Co.  **Pow Camp:** Records use either name - Woodlands or Brookmill.  **February 1945** – The unit (without pows) assembled at 1 Rutland Park, Sheffield (7/2). They took over buildings in Broomhill district and Glossop Road, Sheffield to assemble stores and increase personnel (8/2). They were to move to a site in Ripon – this was cancelled on 16/2.  **17 February 1945 –** Lt Col J S Sly, T.D., R.A., 534 Coast regt. R.A. was made commandant of pow unit 168.  The unit was told to prepare for a move to Evington Camp, near Leicester (17/2). Some personnel visited the site to assist with construction. Other |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1955 |

personnel trained / worked with Lodge Moor Camp 17 and Eden Camp 83. The move was cancelled on 21 March.

**23 March 1945** – New location at Kirkham was visited by Commandant and Q.M.

**24 March 1945** – Move to Kirkham confirmed.

**26 March 1945** – Advance party of 3 officers and 27 other Ranks arrive at the site.

**31 March 1945** – War Diary entry – *“HQ 168 P.W Camp closed Sheffield 0730 hrs, opened Kirkham 1500 hrs. No prisoners of war. Camp under construction. Postal Address – ‘Woodlands’, Kirkham, Lancs…. Strength 11 officers, 178 Other Ranks*.”

**7 April 1945 –** Perimeter lighting installed.

**16 April 1945** – The first pows arrive from Warth Mills Camp 177 – 12 O.R. Germans.

**17 April 1945** – A German Medical Officer arrived from Crewe Hall Camp 191. Major General Moorhead Commander of North West District visited the camp.

**26 / 27 April 1945** – Arrival of pows with very mixed nationalities – Spanish, Hungarian, Rumanian, Swiss, Armenian and Estonian.

**30 April 1945** – Pow strength = 464.

**1 May 1945** – Visit by Protecting Power. This was a representative from Sweden, not Switzerland.

**12 May 1945** – 525 pows arrived.

**14 May 1945** – 35 Italian officers arrived from Featherstone Camp 18.

**22 May 1945** – further intake of 28 Spaniards.

**28 May 1945** – 16 more pows, including 2 Hungarian officers.

**31 May 1945** – a visit by a representative of the International YMCA (Sweden).

There are no further War Diary entries in the National Archive file after this date.

The Spanish pows only stayed for a short time. They had been captured in France and on the Channel Islands wearing the uniform of the Todt organisation. This was regarded as a para-military outfit and so the Spaniards were treated as pows, rather than as civilians forced to work for the Germans. On arrival in the UK they were sent to various camps – one of which was Camp 17 Lodge Moor, Sheffield. They, (about 225 pows) were then collected together at Brookmill.

Many of the Spaniards had been active anti-fascists and protested at being held with Nazis. The British response, though technically correct, was slow, uncertain and appeared to take no account of the circumstances of these particular prisoners. To force a response, on **26 June 1945** the Spaniards declared a hunger strike.

A tragic event occurred on **11 July 1945**, when Spanish pow Agustin Soler committed suicide in protest at being held with fascists. Others also threatened suicide. The weekly newspaper ‘Reynold’s News’ picked up the story in July 1945 under the headline; ‘Loneliest Men in England Today’.

Under political pressure the British authorities at last reacted and organised for the Spaniards to be sent to a camp in Chorley where they were allowed much greater freedom, under a different status, pending a decision on their future.

[**9 October 1945** - The camp was raised in the House of Commons when an MP asked the Secretary of State for War about the ‘*detention of Spanish Republicans at the Kirkham Camp’* – however, by this date they were already located at Chorley – separate details for that camp.]

**14 November 1947** - Camp number included in an ‘Urgent Memorandum’ (FO 939/270) regarding inspection of food parcels. WAS THIS FOR THIS CAMP? - NO 1947 listing.

**After the camp:** Residential area

The site as it is now - <https://repatriatedlandscape.org/england/pow-sites-in-the-north-west/pow-camp-168-brookmill-camp-kirkham/>

**Further Information:**

National Archives WO 166/17825 – 168 Prisoner of War Camp. Camp moved from Sheffield to Kirkham. Prisoners from Hungary, Romania, Estonia, Italy, Armenia, Switzerland and Spain, and other places. Dated Feb-May 1945. Used above.

National Archives FO 1120/230 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 165 to 175. Dated 1 Jan 1946 to 31 Dec 1948