**Camp** **20 (& 300) - Wilton Park, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire (aka Beaconsfield)**

|  |
| --- |
| **1947 Camp List** |
| 300(S.C.) | Wilton Park, Beaconsfield, Bucks | E | Priscamp, Beaconsfield | Beaconsfield 1291 | Beaconsfield | Lt.Col.L.St.Clare-Grondona | v/1507/2 |

|  |
| --- |
| **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 |
| SU 960 903 | 175 | 20 | Wilton Park, Beaconsfield | Buckinghamshire | 4 | Special Camp | See Camp no.300 |

There are several books written about Wilton Park as CSDIC and as a special re-education camp – therefore only an overview below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| D:\kg6gbweb\POW Camps in UK - 1 to 100_files\wilton.jpg**Location:** The camp was in the grounds of an 18th C. house called Wilton Park, near Beaconsfield. The house was also called the ‘White House’.**Previous use:** Wilton Park estate was held by many different families.**Pow Camp:** Recorded as being opened during 1940, as Camp 20 (Appendix to WO 199/405). At first accommodating high-rank Italian officers and some German pows. In 1943, after the surrender at Tunis, Italian Marshal Giovanni Messe, 17 generals and 2 admirals were held within the White House; “*They could play croquet or tennis with two ball-boy Italian pows always provided. Messe had arrived not only with cigars and liqueur in his baggage, but with £1,000 in £5 Bank of England notes, his staff with rather less each. It was allowed back to them in a weekly allowance*.” (Thresholds of Peace – Matthew Sullivan – Hamish Hamilton – 1979). [After the Italian armistice in September 1943, Messe was made Chief of Staff of the Italian Co-belligerent Army].While continuing to hold some high-ranking pows, from July 1942 it was used as the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) for high-ranking German POWs, (formerly at Cockfosters, Camp 10). It was described at this time by the Camp Commandant (St Clair-Grondona):“*Our troops hutments were spaced amid tall trees within a few hundred yards of a Georgian mansion – the White House – which was our officers’ mess and, at the outset, our living quarters, although it*  |  |
| **Ordnance Survey 1960** |

*was subsequently to be put to a very different use. The prisoners’ compound, with its four long intersecting corridors leading to brick-and-cement cells, had been built within a 14ft brick wall that had enclosed a two-acre vegetable garden and orchard; and its low roofs were so camouflaged as to merge into the surrounding landscape and be invisible to other than low-flying aircraft. Cells were heated and each had ample space for four spring-mattressed beds*.” (Sidelights on Wilton Park p34 – L St Clare Grondona)

Techniques to obtain information included basic interrogation, but also bugging conversations.

The CSDIC closed at the end of 1945.

On 12 January 1946, Wilton Park became Camp 300, a special training centre under the wardenship of Heinz Koeppler. It took approximately 300 pows from various camps for a six-week course. At first the work here was regarded as an experiment. The camp was used to discuss, and train for, democracy in post-war Germany. It offered six to eight-week courses. The camp was described in the House of Commons;

*“Mr. (Israel Maurice) Edelman - At Beaconsfield there is a school for the re-education of Germans. The men have been drawn from prisoner of war cages. They have been examined, roughly at first by means of a questionnaire and later in greater detail, and have proved themselves willing and suitable to go back to Germany to serve as a spearhead of democracy. They are not traitors who have sold themselves for money to this country, but people who are genuinely convinced that the way to Germany's regeneration is through democracy.”*

Mr. (John Burns) Hynd – Minister for Germany and Austria replied that he had visited the camp the previous week at its official opening and found; “*this very valuable experiment is something well worth studying by all people interested in the rehabilitation of Germany. It is, of course, in accordance with our policy, that, as far as possible, we should employ in Germany, the largest available proportion of reliable and democratically-minded Germans, and, quite obviously, if we are training selected prisoners of war for various types of occupation, public administration and so on, we shall seek, at the earliest opportunity, to get as many of these as possible back to Germany and into the right kind of employment. Some have gone already; others will follow according to the priority of the demand and the kind of position available, in which they can be of the most use to Germany and to our own administration.*”(House of Commons, 18 March 1946; Vol 420; Cols 1624 - 1656).

Lectures at the camp were held by the pows and by visiting guests, including the philosopher Bertrand Russell, social reformer Lord William Beveridge, and the first female MP, Lady Astor. One German participant says of his time at Wilton Park: “*I was a Nazi; I came to Wilton Park and it changed my life*.” (Wilton Park’s website history).

The camp had its own magazine ‘Die Brűcke’ – another task at the camp was to train pows to become editors at other camps.

From 1947, civilians, including women, from across Europe gradually replaced the pows, who had all left by the summer of 1948. Between 1946 to 1948 about 4,000 pows and 500 civilians attended Wilton Park. The pows were free to travel outside the camp perimeters.

Camp number 300 included in an ‘Urgent Memorandum’ of 14 November 1947 (FO 939/270) regarding inspection of food parcels.

1948 - The last pow course takes place and Wilton Park begins to introduce civilian courses.

**People Associated with the Camp:**

Camp Commandant Lieutenant Colonel Leo St Clare Grondona. Born in Australia. After serving in WW1 he became a journalist and writer. In 1940 he returned to service, recruited by M.I.9

Heinz Koeppler, born in Prussia. After studying at Oxford in the early 1930’s, he refused to return to Nazi Germany.

Prisoners included Italian Field Marshall Giovanni Messe, Field Marshalls von Rundstedt and Busch.

**After the camp:** The house no longer exists. The area was taken over by the army and became for a while the Army College of Military Education. The institution name of ‘Wilton Park’ was still used by the Foreign Office, though its work was moved to Wiston House in West Sussex.

**Further Information:**

National Archives. There are many documents related to Wilton Park held here.

FO 370 contains details of the reorganisation of Wilton Park POW camp to a civilian training centre.

FO 936 / 939 / 945 Control Office for Germany and Austria and Foreign office, German Section: Prisoners of War: files / general department

FO 945 aa: General department.

FO 1120 – Foreign Office: Wilton Park Records. Including student record cards showing details of previous camps, occupation, wartime service, etc. + Documents by Heinz Koeppler detailing the work with pows.

FO 939/276 & 316 – Exhibition: 300 Camp, Wilton Park Training Centre – dated 1946–1948

FO 939/340 – Wilton Park

FO 939/345 – Wilton Park, Beaconsfield. Dated 1946 - 1948

FO 939/347 - Wilton Park training centre. Dated 1947 – 1948.

FO 939/466 – Wilton Park Training centre: selection of PWs for courses – dated 1945–1946

FO 1032/1095 – Training Centre No 300 POW Camp: political reorientation courses. – date 1947-1948

WO 165/39 – M.I.9; includes interrogation of POWs at Wilton Park – dated 1939-1944

WO 208/5621 – Interrogation of POWs – justification for CSDIC Wilton Park Centre – dated 1940-1941

‘Citizenship and Politics: The Legacy of Wilton Park for Post-War Reconstruction – Article by David Welch in Contemporary European History, Vol 6, No 2, July 1997 – Cambridge University Press - pp209-218

‘The M Room’ – Helen Fry – Marranos Press – 2012