**Camp 11** **(& 122) - Rayners Lane, Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex**

Included in the 1945 ICRC – Labour Camp. 122. Rayners Lane Camp, Rayners Lane, Harrow, Middlesex.

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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 |
| TQ 51 18\* | 176 | 11a | Rayner's Lane, Harrow-on- the-Hill | Middlesex | 5 |  |  |
| TQ 13 87 | 176 | 122 | Rayner's Lane Camp, Harrow-on-the-Hill | Middlesex | 5 | See Camp no.11a |  |

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| **1947 Camp list** | | | | | | | |
| 122(G.W.C.) | Rayners Lane Camp, Rayners Lane, Harrow, Middlesex | L.D. | Priswar, Harro | Byron 4471 | Harrow Wealdstone (L.M.S.) Northolt G.W.R. Rayners Lane (Met and Picc Lines) | Lt.Col.G.F.Tillman | v/1453/2 |
| *The entry is crossed out and details for Oxhey Lane Camp 122 inserted* | | | | | | | |

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| **Location:** TQ 13 87. **\***1 NGR for Camp 11 above is incorrect. Rayners Lane is the name of a suburban district in Harrow, as well as the road. 1947 aerial photo; [raf\_cpe\_uk\_2046\_v\_5219 - Aerial Photo | Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/record/raf_cpe_uk_2046_v_5219)    "*Ministry of Works temporary office buildings, erected in November 1942, were taken over to house Italian collaborator prisoners of war in October 1944.  When they finally moved out (some time after July 1945), they were replaced by German P.O.W.s (122 German Prisoner of War Working Camp).  The Germans moved to a camp on the site of the later Bannister Sports Centre, off the Uxbridge Road, on March 15th 1947*". Bob Thomson, Local History Librarian. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1960 |

**Previous use:** mainly farm land, then temporary office buildings.

**POW Camp:**

Main camp located at Site 1, TQ 135 870. There was possibly an additional site for Italian pows behind the Gaumont - this description of a small camp and a Captain C.O. would seem to describe an annex at Site 2 above. “… *I met… an Army Captain who I never knew other than as 'Johnny'. He was the C.O. of an Italian Prisoner of War camp which was situated only about a quarter of a mile from my home on what had been waste ground behind our local 'Gaumont' Cinema in Rayners Lane, in the north west London suburbs. He invited me to dinner at the camp. There were only four officers on the camp so the Officers’ Mess was not large. It was in a Nissen hut exactly the same as those in which all the prisoners were accommodated. The security was extremely lax since none of the prisoners had any desire to escape! They were mostly employed locally doing odd jobs or being 'let-out' to farmers further outside London. Those that remained on camp were the ones whose skills could contribute most to the comfort of the camp staff!*

*The Officer's Mess was staffed by ex waiters, some of whom had been with large hotels in Italy; there were also three top flight chefs and experienced kitchen staff. The Catering Officer, an elderly, to my eyes at the time, pre-war hotelier had co-opted the services of several English-speaking prisoners who had been barmen and had made suitable arrangements with several local pubs and hotels to provide staff in exchange for certain 'perks'. Thus it was that, in the middle of war-rationed Britain I was treated to a superb four-course Italian dinner which included wine and liqueurs!*

*The evening even included a short concert of operatic arias by ten of the prisoners who had formed a choir. This was the first of many visits I paid to this POW camp and it was still in existence at the end of the war. In fact, quite a lot of the prisoners opted to stay in Britain and carry on with their war-time jobs. At least two of them later obtained licences and became pub landlords in their own right!”* Peter Brett's memoirs - Settling down to Squadron life - <https://northoltgrange.files.wordpress.com>

Italian pows at the camp were classed as co-operators. However, within a very short time of arriving, they were on the recei[ving](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1944-11-28/debates/fa6c82b8-81b3-47d2-afed-30868210502d/ItalianCo-OperatorsPinner?highlight=rayners%20lane#contribution-1f0658cf-27e9-458a-a0ea-7957c8ac3756) end of what appears to be an anti-Italian campaign being led by some of the press and reflected by some local people;

**November 1944** - the Italian camp leader, Major G Rescazzi wrote to the camp commandant to complain about the way his men were being treated with, “*cases of insults, provocations and even spitting … as everyday occurrences*”. He pointed out that a press campaign was also being waged against Italians and stirring up trouble; “*The public has described the co-operator with the most injurious titles, i.e. “WOP,” “Lazy Devils,” “Third Rate People.”*” (WO 32/10737, Major G. Rescazzi to Commandant 122nd Italian Labour Battalion, Rayners Lane Camp, 28 Nov. 1944).

**28 November 1944** - The matter was raised, from an opposing point of view, in the House of Commons:

“*Mr. Norman Bower (MP for Harrow) asked the Secretary of State for War if he is aware that women are being continually molested after dark by Italian co-operators camped at Rayners Lane, Pinner; and if he will issue instructions to the camp commandant that these men are not to be allowed outside the camp after dark.*

*Sir J. Grigg - Seventeen hundred Italian co-operators have been accommodated in this camp for nearly six weeks, and only a very few complaints of this nature have been made, either to the police or to the camp commandant. I do not consider that this justifies the withdrawal from all these co-operators of the privilege to exercise outside their camp until 10 p.m.*

*Mr. Bower - Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are very many complaints about this sort of thing, that it is causing great anxiety and indignation in the neighbourhood, and that complaints to the camp commandant appear to be utterly ineffective?*

*Sir J. Grigg - My information is not in accord with that of the hon. Member. There have been a few complaints to the police. I may be a little out of date, but when I last heard there had not been a single complaint to the camp commandant.*

Mr Bower did not get much support for his claims, even from members of his own party:

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*Sir Reginald Blair (MP for Hendon) - Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member who represents the constituency in which Rayners Lane is situated has not received a single complaint, and that from his own personal investigations and other inquiries he believes that the behaviour of these Italian co-operators is very good indeed?*

*Mr. Ivor Thomas - Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this campaign against Italian co-operators bears many of the marks of the anti-Semitic campaign in Germany? Will he also bear in mind the words of the Foreign Secretary a few years ago that there is no such word as "vendetta" in the English language?”*

(House of Commons, 28 November, 1944, Vol 404, Col 2384).

**December 1945** - Brondesbury Park Hostel transferred from Winter Quarters Camp 7 to Camp 122. (See below).

**1945/6** - Italian pows sent to other camps or repatriated.

**Spring 1946** – Additional intake of about 880 pows from camps in the USA (via other UK camps). Most had very low morale as they had been misinformed in the US that they were being repatriated. Instead, they found themselves in working camps in the UK.

**1 June 1946** – Oxhey Lane, Hatch End, formerly Camp 274, was taken over as a satellite camp.

**21 and 28 July 1946** – Camp magazines - [Wille und Weg : Lagerzeitung Camp 122 Harrow MDDX. - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/112808/)

**Summer 1946** - the Harrow Housing committee discussed the future of the pow camp; “*Rayners Lane Housing Site Adjoining Prisoner of War Camp: The committee considered the question... as to the continued occupation by German prisoners of war of the temporary office buildings erected by the Ministry of Works on the land at Rayners Lane housing estate, held under requisition by the Minister of Works, in view of the undesirability of maintaining the camp in close proximity to the Council houses, which will soon be completed and occupied*.” They resolved to request that the temporary buildings be removed as soon a possible.

**10 August 1946** - The Ministry of Works informed the Harrow Housing Committee that they intended to remove the remaining pows from the camp at the end of September, 1946. (Harrow Housing Committee, ad-hoc committee, and 28 September 1946; Minute 616).

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| Oversight and development of re-education activities and English teaching for German pows was carried out by PID (Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office) / COGA (Control Office for Germany and Austria – UK). Visits and reports were made. The standard of the reports varied greatly. The visitors took little interest, if any, in activities other than re-education. They rarely mentioned welfare, sports, games, pastimes, crafts, etc of the pows. If there were still Italian pows in hostels, they were usually ignored by PID. |

**14/15 August 1946** – Visit to “*Start re-education*.” Recorded as the 1st PID visit. Strength; 1 officer, 1086 Other Ranks – NOT including the Oxhey Lane satellite camp which had a separate report.

Commandant: Lt Col Tillman Camp leader: Fw Dagne (B+)

Interpreter: Captain Dickson Deputy C/L: O/Wm Ronneberger (B)

Adjutant: Captain Wealleans German M.O.: O/Arzt Hoflich (B+)

Commandant Tillman was co-operative with the PID visitors.

The interpreter was new to work in pow camps. 2 S/Sgt interpreters had just left the camp.

The camp leader had previously been at Oxhey Lane Camp 274.

Simplified political screening figures were given – B 132 / Unscreened 954. The visitor estimated that the pows were; 50% black (Category C – Nazis) / 47% grey (B) / 3% white (A – Non-Nazis). Those considered to be Nazis were not active, but at least 50% of them were anti-British and anti-democratic. There were 244 Afrika Corps and 37 SS men who were “*openly contemptuous of any mention of democracy*.” No communist activity was detected.

There were 478 ‘Youth’ pows (under-25), many from camps in the USA and many were C category. There was no special provision for them.

Re-education activities had barely started. The standard list of re-education activities was given:

Wochenpost / Ausblick – 400/450 copies.

Newspapers – Inadeqaute – only three copies each of the Herald, Express, Chronicle and Mail purchased through the Welfare Fund, (money raised through sales in the canteen). Few German papers were received.

Library – No details other than £20 set aside from the Welfare Fund to buy more.

Lectures – Only three lectures so far.

Discussion groups – Due to start weekly.

Films – YMCA and COGA films. More newsreels requested.

Wireless – “*Adequate.”*

Camp magazine – weekly with 160 copies. Very few contributors. Paper urgently required.

Press review – Due to start.

English instruction – 150 pupils.

Other camp activities –

Religion – Protestant padre at the satellite camp visited the main camp – low interest. A civilian RC priest visited twice a week with excellent attendance.

Education – Classes expected to start.

Theatre – Stage and scenery available. The satellite camp had an opera company that visited main camp.

Orchestra – The satellite camp orchestra visited main camp.

It was expected that the main camp would be merged with the satellite and the HQ transferred to Oxhey Lane – but this did not happen for several months.

**14 October 1945** – A visiting lecturer reported pow concerns that they were not allowed to leave the camp for walks, unlike other camps outside of the Greater London area.

**10 January 1947** – Lecturer’s report; many pows expected to move soon from this camp with good accommodation to the Oxhey Lane site with mainly tents.

**18-20 February 1947** – Lecturer’s report noted that there was a pow hostel at Dancers Hill, South Mimms.

**13 March 1947** – After over 6 months of rumour, the move from Rayners Lane to Oxhey Lane, Hatch End, took place. A ‘Report of Move’ was issued with completion expected by 15 March. A list of 92 organisations / individuals was listed to be contacted.

2 detachments were listed:

- Dancers Hill Camp, South Mimms, Herts (South Mimms 3130)

- Hostel, Radnor Hall, Allum Lane, Elstree (Elstree 1532).

Rayners Lane camp closed soon after this report.

**After the camp:** Became temporary housing estate with prefabricated buildings - pow workers were part of the building workforce. Later brick built residential estate.

**Further information:**

National Archives FO 939/308 – 122 Working Camp, Hatch End Camp, Harrow, Middlesex. Dated 1946-1947. Used above – most of this file contains details of Rayners Lane Camp 122 with Oxhey Lane as its satellite camp.

**Brondesbury Park Hostel.** 1a Brondesbury Park Road, Kilburn, London, NW6 7BS (NGR TQ 241 841).

**Late 1944** - at first attached to Winter Quarter Camp 7. Pows were selected to work at the hostel with the Political Intelligence Department (PID). It held up to 90 pows.

**December 1945** – Hostel attached to Camp 122. The pows were mainly involved in producing materials for re-education activities. About 30 worked with PID / BBC to produce radio broadcasts, (see Ascot-Brondesbury Scheme under Camp 7).

Lecturers regularly visited the hostel, their reports are in file FO 939/309 32 Working Camp, Brondesbury Hostel Camp, Kilburn, dated 1946-47. Most reports only concerned the lecture and the pow’s responses, some gave minor snippets of information about the site. The pows were anti-Nazi’s – amongst them were at least two padres, trade unionists, social democrats, teachers…

**1946** - Commandant Captain Green.

**20 March 1946** – Report by a visiting lecturer (Dr Demuth) listed as a hostel with German and Austrian pows.

**May 1946** **onwards** – Austrian pows left for repatriation. The hostel was referred to as number 122G or 122B. Attendance at lectures was mostly between 40 to 60. High intelligence noted as well as high standards of English.

**October 1946** – the War Office stopped funding the Ascot-Brondesbury Scheme. Radio broadcasts by pows continued, but costs for board and lodging of the pows were paid for by the BBC, (they had paid the POWs' wages since December 1944).

**March 1947** – Brondesbury hostel was taken over by Wormwood Scrubbs Camp 32.

**Oxhey Lane, Hatch End** – Satellite Camp.

**1 June 1946** – became satellite camp, formerly independent Camp 274.

**8/9 August 1946** – Survey of re-education. Strength; 1 officer, 970 OR. Bell tents for accommodation.

Satellite Officer i/c: Capt W Fleming Camp leader: O/Faehnr Franke (B)

Interpreter: S/Sgt Bass Deputy C/L: O/Faehnr L’Hoste (B)

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| Political screening: | A+ | A | B | B- | C | Unscreened |
|  | 4 | 65 | 503 | 3 | 9 | 387 |

Captain Fleming was recorded as “*excellent*.” [He took over from Captain Taylor on 18 July 1946].

Morale was described as “*unsteady*” – due to the British press calling for early repatriation and the lack of any official information about this. The prospect of another winter under canvas was depressing. Three huts were being built for recreation, education and other amenities. There was much bitterness about reports from letters that SS men and Nazis were free in Germany. It was believed there was a large number of pows interested in communism, though it was doubted if they actually knew what this meant.

372 pows were ‘youth’ – there were no special provisions for them.

The standard list of re-education activities was given – these were more advanced than the main camp as this had previously been an independent camp:

Ausblick – 122 copies last received in April.

Wochenpost – usually 240 copies weekly (450 in the previous week).

Newspapers – A large range of newspapers were paid for by the Welfare Fund. 6/7 German papers received fortnightly.

Lecturers – regular and popular.

Discussion groups – 350 pows attended weekly meetings.

Films – so far only YMCA films. No newsreels had been shown.

Wireless – “*Quite satisfactory*.”

Camp magazine – 140 copies, weekly. A weekly prize was offered by Captain Fleming for the best article. Paper urgently needed.

Press reviews – Very popular with 400 men attending reviews held Monday to Friday.

English instruction – 120 pupils, but only 1 teacher. More text books requested.

Other camp activities –

Religion – RCs had twice weekly visits from a civilian priest. Protestant padre, O/Lt Wallmann (B) was popular.

Education – classes started for French (32 pupils), Latin (17), German (10) and radio engineering (11).

Theatre – A small group produced variety shows and operettas. They needed costumes and props.

Orchestra – Satisfactory. 7 members with 5 instruments gave concerts. Sheet music requested.

**10/11 December 1946** – Survey of re-education. Strength; 1 officer, 924 OR.

There was a new Interpreter Officer; Captain Dickson, who had, “*only a slight knowledge of German.”*

Morale was not good due in particular to slow repatriations and bad news from Germany. Accommodation was still in tents for the majority, though these were slowly being replaced by huts. The attitude of the British and German staff was “*satisfactory.”* There were no active Nazis, and the support for communism had all but died out.

Screening figures; A 68 / B 831 / C 26. 87 pows were appealing against their grades, (the better the grade, the sooner repatriated, in theory). 89 pows repatriated to date, including 55 medical cases.

Changes to re-education activities –

Films - YMCA and COGA supplied films. COGA films were often newsreels, documentaries and British entertainment films with German subtitles.

Press reviews - held 2 or 3 times a week with c.250 men present.

Other Camp activities –

Religion – The protestant padre, O/Lt Wallmann, was less popular and only 10% attended his services. A remarkable incident occurred when it was believed that he had spread a rumour that that the camp was regarded as black (Nazis). He seems to have admitted this and, “*he showed great nervousness and fainted during interrogation.”*

Education – 3 classes; French (26), Latin (5) and bookkeeping (18).

**Dancers Hill,** South Mimms – Hostel. Previously with Scrubs Lane Camp 32.

**February 1947** - First recorded as being administered by Rayners Lane Camp 122.

**13 March 1947** – transferred to Oxhey Lane Camp 122.

**Radnor Hall**, Allum Lane, Elstree (Elstree 1532). NGR 183 958. Previously with Scrubs Lane Camp 32.

**March 1947** – recorded in the move to Hatch End.