**Camp 235 T****he Arches, Felden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire**

|  |
| --- |
| **1947 Camp List** |
| 235(G.W.C.) | “The Arches,” Felden, Nr.Hemel Hempstead, Herts | E. | Priswar Hemel Hempstead | Boxmoor 785&996 | (Blank) | Lt.Col.R.M.Millar M.C. | v/1453/2 |

|  |
| --- |
| **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 |
| TL 040 050 | 166 | 235 | The Arches, Felden, Hemel Hempstead | Hertfordshire | 5 | German Working Camp | Precise location not identified, NGR given for centre village |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location:** I found one reference locating ‘The Arches’ – *“Boxmoor has a station on the line and it is less than a mile – if a stiff uphill walk – from the station to a large house in comparatively rural surroundings, in a place too small to have a name, but nonetheless called Felden. Its isolation, hilltop setting and railway link made Felden the perfect place for foreign spies to keep an eye on an ally of dubious intentions. The house was called ‘The Arches’ and it was requisitioned by the British in May 1943….On 22 June 1943, the Polish Radio Intelligence Company commanded by Captain Kazimierz Zieliński moved into the house, in whose grounds there were now 8m radio masts and associated outbuildings…” (From ‘X, Y & Z: The Real Story of How Enigma Was Broken,”* by Dermot Turing). There is no trace of ‘The Arches’ on maps I have seen, however, a plaque on the house commemorates the Radio Intelligence Company. Clive, a member of ww2talk.com did the leg work and found the house with the plaque – it is now called ‘Widgeons,’ in Streethanger Lane, Felden, NGR TL 042 054. On some earlier maps it was labelled ‘Widgeon’s Rest’ – shown on the map and 1946 aerial photo, right. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1948 |

**The Arches/Widgeons is a large house, behind which can be seen rectangular huts and 2 Nissen type huts. A report below referred to ‘The Arches’ site having a “*great communal hut.*”

Chris Whittle, a volunteer for the Box Moor Trust, informed me that a site was also located at Howe’s Retreat Farm, (also shown on the map). I think this is likely to be the site called; “Felden Howes Wood” in the October 1947 report below. The farm was located at NGR TL 039 050. It is shown in the 1946 photo, left, with many Nissen type huts in the grounds.

1946 aerial photographs of both sites: [raf\_cpe\_uk\_1775\_v\_5060 - Aerial Photo | Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/record/raf_cpe_uk_1775_v_5060)

It seems that the HQ buildings/offices and possibly some accommodation was at The Arches, and mainly accommodation huts at Howes Farm. The split site was referred to as either, ‘The Arches’ or ‘Felden’ in the reports.

**Before the camp:** The Arches was used by the Polish Radio Intelligence Company from 1943 to 1945. Howe’s Retreat was a pleasure ground at the turn of the 19th C.

**Pow Camp:**

**July 1946** - Felden was listed as the location of a pow hostel for 88 pows, administered by Gorhambury Camp 235. (Chorley Wood / Holtsmere End / Northchurch were also pow hostels administered by Gorhambury).

**Summer 1946 (before September) -** The site(s) at Felden became the HQ, operating as administrative and postal centre. It took the number 235 from Gorhambury, which then became a hostel.

**10 November 1946** – Camp Magazine, edition 2: [Weg und Ziel : Monatschrift des Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen Lagers 235 : Felden - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/112800/)

|  |
| --- |
| 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. |

**22/25 January 1947** – Re-education report. This was the 3rd visit, but the previous reports are not included in the National Archive file. Strength; 2 officers, 1263 Other Ranks at HQ, 4 hostels and billets.

Commandant: Lt Col Millar Camp leader: Gefr Edmund Fester (B+)

Interpreter: S/Sgt Eisenberg Deputy C/L: -

 German M.O.: Dr Wolfgang Seidel (B)

The Commandant had transferred from Gorhambury Camp 235. Like most Commandants he was not interested in re-education, but did not obstruct activities.

The Interpreter had also transferred from Gorhambury Camp 235.

Camp leader Fester, aged 39, ships-broker for the Blue Funnel Line, “*well disposed towards Britain” – “Excellent type of C/L.”* Unusually, he was not regarded as the overall camp leader, just for The Arches. Each hostel was administered by The Arches, but had their own independent leaders. It was planned to hold fortnightly meetings of all the leaders to encourage co-operation.

The M.O. and dentist (Dr Brodel (B)) took no part in re-education activities.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | B | C | Unscreened |
|  | 2 | 389 | 134 | 740 |

150 pows were appealing against their political grades – the better the grade, the sooner repatriated, in theory.

Morale was recorded as “*generally high*” especially at Felden and Gorhambury. Positive factors were; good treatment, decreased restrictions on movement out of the camp, and friendly and helpful local civilians.

40% of pows at Felden were ‘youth’ (under-25). They were not regarded as a problem.

There was a “*great communal hut*” at the Felden site.

The standard list of re-education activities was given:

Wochenpost and Ausblick – Separate appendix. More Ausblick requested.

Newspapers – Satisfactory supply of British papers at all sites. Very few German papers received from COGA. Subscriptions had been made to supply 2 Swiss papers in future.

Library – Arrangements being made to circulate books around the sites.

Lectures – Regular to all sites. Lack of heating reduced attendances.

Discussion group – weekly at Felden and Gorhambury. None at the other sites.

Films – YMCA and Gaumont British films. COGA newsreels were also sent.

Wireless – Generally satisfactory, but the Felden set was out of order.

Camp magazine – issued.

Press review – at Felden, Gorhambury and Chorley Wood.

English instruction – separate appendix. Little interest.

Information room – Not started.

Other camp activities –

Religion – Protestant padre Schliebitz (A), was transferred from Gorhambury where he was described as; “*rather colourless.*” A better report this time; *“a very good type of man… His influence is good but he lacks fire and is depressed by the bad news from his family, who are in the Russian zone.”* Pows able to attend local churches.

Education – “*Some activity*” at Felden and Gorhambury.

Entertainment – A small band, 2 choirs (ecclesiastic and temporal), and theatre.

**6/7 May 1947** – Re-education report. Strength; 1 officer (the MO), 1420 OR.

No changes to senior personnel.

The very unusual system of having no overall Camp leader continued. The Felden camp leader was upgraded to (A).

Simplified screening figures were given: A 10 / B 1411. The results of appeals were not given except in a general comment that many C’s had been upgraded to B. There were no further appeals.

Morale was “*fairly high*.” There had been an improvement in rations after an inspection by the District commander.

The British staff had no interest in re-education. Many activities stopped during the cold weather. At Felden only one hut could be used for activities due to an increase in strength.

Changes to activities –

Newspapers – the Swiss papers ordered using the Welfare fund (money raised mainly through sales in the canteen) had still not arrived.

Library – 170 books supplied by the International Red Cross. The book exchange system between sites was unsatisfactory.

Discussion groups – at all sites except Chorley Wood.

Films – Holtsmere End was only visited by the YMCA film unit.

Wireless – now satisfactory at all sites.

English instruction – increased interest at most sites. No instruction at Chorley Wood.

Religion – a new RC priest, OGefr Franz Kunze (A), aged 36, Jesuit, transferred from The Wynches Camp 411, “*strong, quiet character.”*

**2-5 September 1947** – Re-education report. Strength; 1 officer, 1166 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col R R Dauban Camp leader: Gefr Paul Schliebitz (A)

Interpreter: S/Sgt Eisenberg Felden C/L: Uffz Walter Gnacy (B+)

 German M.O.: Dr Wolfgang Seidel (B)

The new Commandant was *“interested*” in re-education.

The Interpreter was due to be demobilised in 2 weeks.

Padre Schliebitz was acting as Camp spokesman, but each site was run independently. Fortnightly leader meetings were held.

The Felden leader was aged 32, a painter; “Quiet, intelligent.”

Screening figures – A 1 (padre) / B 1166. 1000 pows repatriated to date – but, the next report stated about 800.

Morale had dropped to “*rather low.”* This was put down to bad news from Germany, apathy and absence of guilt, and partly to a curious; “*over indulgence by the local population*.” Contact with locals was; “*largely of an amorous nature or for the sake of what the PsW can get in the way of hospitality*.”

40% were ‘youth’ they were “*very critical of everything that is offered them, they take little interest in re-educational matters, preferring to leave the camp at every possible opportunity.”* Not surprising if the local population were as amorous as made out.

Changes to activities –

Newspapers – The subscribed Swiss papers were arriving.

Library – 1200 books and a better system for circulating books around the sites.

Lectures – usually very poorly attended.

Discussion groups – all ceased.

Press review – all ceased.

Information rooms – Exhibitions of text and pictures on a theme were held at Felden, Chorley Wood and Gorhambury.

Entertainment – theatre group disbanded due to repatriations.

Formal outside contacts – Visits to the camp by lay preachers. Gramophone and music recitals, and Salvation Army Band, visited. 30 pows from Felden visited the pow art exhibition in London.



< Pow postcard from 1947. The Arches HQ acted as mail address – post was received there and distributed to the other sites / or posted on. This card has the letter ‘G’ added to the camp number – possibly for Gorhambury?

**29/30 September and 2 October 1947** – Re-educational survey. Strength; 1 officer, 1071 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col R R Dauban Camp leader: Uffz Kirchhoff (B+)

Interpreter: Capt Reichenbaum

The new camp leader was making, “*a good impression.”*

Morale was described as “*good.”*

Following on so soon after the last report there were few changes –

Films – Travelling Films Ltd had replaced Gaumont British.

Outside contacts for Felden – Some pows visited Hemel Hempstead Town Council.

Sadly, the report neglects to say why 6 pows were in jail.

**Towards end 1947** – The Arches camp closed. Lt Col Dauben was recorded as Commandant at Nether Heage Camp 58 in December 1947.

Known Camp Commandants:

c1947 Lt Col R M Millar M.C. (I think he was from the Royal Armoured Corps).

1947 Lt Col R R Dauban. From the Royal Artillery. He moved on to Nether Heage Camp 58.

**After the camp:** There is a plaque to the Polish Radio Intelligence Company on the house. <https://twitter.com/polishembassyuk/status/755731462985543680>

Howe’s Retreat was used as a displaced person’s camp, then a pig farm, and now part of the Box Moor Trust - <https://www.boxmoortrust.org.uk/the-estate/>

**Further Information:**

National Archives FO 1120/233 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 230 to 235. Dated 1 January 1946 to 31 December 1948. Used above.

**Numbers of pows**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Open |  |  | With other camps |  |  | Unknown |  |  | Not listed / not open |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Before | 1/1947 | 5/1947 | 9/1947 | 10/1947 | After |
| HQ | A hostel for Gorhambury 235 | 271 | 448 | 400 | 23 |  |
| Chorley Wood | With Gorhambury C235 | 469 | 480 | 340 | 293 | With C95 |
| Gorhambury | Was C235 | 296 | 328 | 252 | 215 | With C95 |
| Holtsmere End | With Gorhambury C235 | 75 | 70 | 66 | 54 |  |
| Northchurch | With Gorhambury C235 | 53 |  |  |  |  |
| Felden-Howes Wood | See below | \* | \* | \* | 371 | With C95 |
| In Jail |  | - | - | - | 6 | - |
| Billets |  | 101 | 95 | 109 | 110 | - |
| TOTALS |  | 1265 | 1421 | 1167 | 1072 |  |

\* This site may have been included in the numbers for HQ.

**Hostels**

**Chorley Wood.** 20-30 Nissen huts in the grounds of Chorleywood House, + some outbuildings used. TQ 035 971.

Previously with Gorhambury Camp 235

**1/1947** – Hostel leader; Ogefr Werner Blank (B), aged 27, hairdresser. He had been a member of the Afrikakorps, Hitler Youth and the NSKK (Nazi Motor Corps). Spoke excellent ‘American.’ “*He seems willing to oblige but has no positive influence on re-education.”*

The hostel was suffering from “*the complete absence of heating*” – no reason given for this. 20% were ‘youth’ pows. The wireless had only 1 speaker in a large room.

**5/1947** – Hostel leader; Fw Bernd Hengstermann (B-), aged 25, bank clerk, paratrooper volunteer. “*Intelligent and honest… co-operative*.” Good theatre group – it had performed ‘Charley’s Aunt’ in the local Methodist Church.

**10/1947** – same leader. Local free churches organised events, particularly through the Methodist Youth Fellowship, so that the whole camp (and Holtsmere End) had English friends.

**11/1947** – administered by Batford Camp 95.

**Felden-Howes Wood**

I believe this was the site at ‘Howe’s Retreat’ mentioned above. In November 1947 Howe’s Retreat was listed with Batford camp 95, and the same camp leader, Uffz Kirchhoff.

**Gorhambury**

Was previously HQ Camp 235.

**1/1947** – Hostel leader; Gerhard Prohaska (B+), aged 28. “*Shaping well and furthering re-education*.” 40% were ‘youth’ pows. **5/1947** – same leader.

**9/1947** – Hostel leader; St Ofw Alfred Lukas (B+), aged 36, in Regular navy; “*Intelligent, co-operative.”* 60 pows had visited the Bishop’s Garden Party.

**10/1947** – same leader. A wide range of social and religious contacts were available – organised by a resident of St Albans, Mr Tom Slade.

**11/1947** - Administered by Batford camp 95. Closed in 1948.

**Holtsmere End**

Previously with Gorhambury Camp 235.

**1/1947** – Hostel leader; Oskar Lemaire (B), he had been leader when this hostel was administered by Gorhambury, aged 32, a plasterer. *“Eager to please but mentally very depressed by the bad news from his family.”* It was recommended that he be replaced.

Pows were seen to be apathetic, the hostel was remote and there were few activities. Very few had been screened so their repatriation was uncertain. 50% were ‘youth’ pows.

**5/1947** – Hostel leader; Gefr Sigismund Berkricht (B+), aged 41, tax inspector, member of the Nazi Party in 1942. “*Definite democratic outlook and very helpful in re-education.”*

**10/1947** – same leader.

**Northchurch.** SP 976 085.

Previously with Gorhambury Camp 235

**1/1947** – Hostel leader; Gefr Richard Haertel (B-), aged 23. *“This hostel leader is insincere and in* [visitor’s] *opinion unsatisfactory, but no volunteers for the position could be found.”* 35% were ‘youth’ pows.