**Camp 88** **- Mortimer Camp, Stratfield Mortimer, Berkshire**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Labour Camp. Mortimer Camp, Mortimer, Reading, Berks.

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| **1947 Camp list** | | | | | | | |
| 88(G.W.C.) | Mortimer Camp, Mortimer, Reading, Berks | S. | Priswar, Reading | Mortimer 74 | Mortimer | Lt.Col.C.C.Smythe, O.B.E. M.C. | v/1453/2 |

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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 |
| SU 678 635 | 175 | 88 | Mortimer Camp, Stratfield Mortimer | Berkshire | 4 | German Working Camp | STANDARD type. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location:** No indication at all for the NGR listed above on the 1961 map – site may have been cleared by then. Local memories place the camp by Little Park Farm, shown at bottom of map.  **Before the camp:** Farmland.  **Pow Camp:** Italian working camp / labour battalion to 1945, then a German working camp. The site had a standard layout with a main pow compound, with guards’ huts and offices at the front. Common buildings and facilities at standard type camps included water towers, offices, officer's mess, a canteen, guard rooms, barrack huts, ablution blocks, cell blocks, a camp reception station (medical facility/hospital), a cookhouse, dining rooms, recreation rooms and living huts or tents.  D:\kg6gbweb\POW Camps in UK - 1 to 100_files\POWBook.jpg  **1943** – 3 Hostels listed for Italians: Kempshott; Rotherfield Greys; Pangbourne.  < **December 1943** – Christmas drawing on a pow postcard.  **5 May 1944** - Hostel listed for Italian pows (WO 32/10737): Rotherfield Greys, Henley on Thames, Oxon.  **May and November 1944** - The camp was listed as an Italian Labour Battalion under the Southern Command area, and then as an Italian POW Working Camp, (WO 32/10737). The Italians were recorded as non-co-operators.  **Mid 1945** – German pows arrived and Italians were sent to other camps and hostels prior to repatriation. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1961 |
| 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. | |

**July 1945** – PID Progress Report 124 noted a temporary tented extension for 50 pows. (FO 939/383).

**3 August 1945** – PID Progress Report 147 by the Segregation Section regarding screening. Pows had been politically screened and it was recommended that 54 Nazis be removed from the camp to be replaced by a similar number of A/B’s from camp 23.

**10-11 August 1945** – Report by (name unreadable). (Mis-filed in National Archive folder FO 939-296)

Interpreter Officer; Lt Steiner. Camp leader: Stabs-Feldwebel Roegner; “*though efficient, was absolutely dumb and had no influence at all among the men.*”

There were about 1000 mainly German pows – unknown number of Italians. Politically, the camp was classed as ‘Grey.’ Some pows were from Poland and Czechoslovakia and so had their own problems about returning home.

There were no complaints about the food and most pows worked for the rate of 1½d per hour.

The camp had not received any books or German newspapers from PID. Only a few English newspapers were received from the officers’ mess.

There were pow teachers of English and a great interest for lessons, but a lack of text books. Other classes for maths and science had been stopped because of the harvest.

It was hoped that a team from Ascot (special training camp – Winter Quarters Camp 7) would visit soon. (A team of 7 arrived October 1945 to help set-up re-education activities).

**15 September 1945** – 2 Hostels listed for pows from this camp, (WO 32/10737): Kempshott, Basingstoke, Hants / Winchfield, Hook, Hampshire.

**September 1945** - Appendix to HQ Southern Command War Diary: Mortimer, Reading – German Labour camp – capacity 1000 – 113/154868

Italian hostels – Kempshott, Winchfield, Alton, Theale – total cap 250 / German hostels – Thedden Grange, Alton – cap 100 [I think this was one hostel].

**2 and 3 November 1945** – English Inspector’s Report. Inspectors met teachers, gave talks, checked teaching texts and resources, and tested the pow pupils.

The Inspector mentioned Thedden Grange hostel with about 140 pows, but he ignored all Italian hostels.

**12 March 1946** – English Inspector’s report. Strength of main camp, 950.

Interpreter: S/Sgt Shuttleworth [new]

Accommodation in tents – some huts used for other purposes such as dining and a classroom.

**10/12 April 1946** – General survey. Strength; 1 Officer (the M.O.), 975 Other Ranks – at main, 1 hostel and billets.

250 pows had arrived from camps in the USA. They generally 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. There was a note in this report that contradicts other reports in other camps: “*American PW state that no official promise of repatriation was given in America. American officers were vague and said they did not know the destination.”* They were politically screened in the next visit.

It was stated that morale was being maintained through re-education and comments from the ex-US pows about better treatment. Negative factors were lack of certainty concerning repatriation and crowded space.

Rumours were circulating in the camp concerning a future attack by the allies on Russia, including 60 German divisions. Three pows volunteered to join British forces. The main source for this was said to be stories in the American press.

Many pows were suspicious about re-education activities. Lt Steiner had left the camp and no British staff were promoting activities. The standard list was given:

Newspapers – a range of British papers were received; no mention of German or Swiss papers.

Library – 400 books, 140 German.

Lectures – regular with 50 to 100 attending.

Discussion groups – started 3 weeks earlier, meeting on Sunday evenings to discuss political events and ideas.

Films – from YMCA fortnightly.

Wireless – “*listening facilities are fair.”*

Camp magazine - *Die Stimme*, (The Voice). Started in September 1945. “*The standard seemed quite high.”*

Press review – daily review on noticeboard. A press review meeting weekly attended by about 100 pows.

English instruction – 120 pupils in 5 classes.

Other camp activities -

Religion – low interest. 50 to 100 attended services given by a Protestant padre. No RC padre, a priest from Reading visited, but he did not speak German.

Education – French (12 in class), Spanish (10), Latin and Greek (4), bookkeeping and shorthand (10). Some “*unreliable*” teachers had been removed – this usually meant politically C grade.

Theatre – giving regular performances.

Orchestra – “*an important feature of camp life*.” Mostly light music with some classical concerts.

**15/16 April 1946** – Visit to carry our political screening. Strength c.980.

Commandant: Lt Col C C Smyth OBE, MC. Camp leader: F Baer (A)

Assistant: Major A Hunter Deputy C/L: H Stehjuhn (B) [Stejuhn later in report – Pejuhn in a different report]

Interpreter: S/Sgt V R Shuttleworth (REME) German M.O.: Dr H Jordan (A), “*definitely an Anti-Nazi.”*

The Commandant was regarded as co-operative with the aims of re-education – note that this did not mean he actually did anything about it.

The Camp Leader had attended the special training course at Ascot and was due for repatriation.

The deputy C/L was aged 26, “*a bright and pleasant type who is gaining a reputation for efficiency*.”

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political grading: | A+ | A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C | C+ | Unknown |
|  | - | 75 | - | 45 | 676 | 33 | 137 | 1 | 9 |

**5 June 1946** – English Inspector’s Report. Total strength; 1084 in main, 2 hostels and billets. 133 pupils in 8 classes at all sites.

Lagersprecher (Camp Leader): Lieberknecht

94 pows still in tents, the rest in huts.

**8 October 1946** – English Inspector’s Report. Total strength; 1164 in main, 4 hostels and billets. 149 pupils in 8 classes at all sites.

Lagersprecher: Kroos [since August]

All pows in huts. Classes had been suspended during the harvest months and were just re-starting.

**17/18 December 1946** – Re-educational survey. Strength; 2 officers, 1068 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col C C Smyth OBE, MC. Camp leader: Owm H Kroos (B)

Interpreter: Capt A C Sharland Deputy C/L: Fw Julius Simon (B+) [since October]

German M.O.: Stabsarzt Dr Roth (A)

Comment that “*It is doubtful if the commandant will ever become a power for re-education.”* This was the same in most camps; generally, Commandants allowed activities to take place, but did not actively support them.

The IO was “*energetic*” and made some efforts to assist in re-education, but he was hampered by lack of support from the Commandant.

Camp Leader, aged 32, a farmer – “*honest and willing but does little to further re-education*.”

Deputy C/L, aged 37 – “*a pleasant shy man but of no political significance*.”

Simplified screening was in use: A 7 / B 863 / C 192. This was a high number of C grade (Nazi) pows.

168 pows repatriated to date; 127 A grades - 1 B - 20 Miners - 3 Timber workers - 17 sick.

Pows were depressed due to slow repatriations, bad news from home, an excessive military tone, and being told their political grades. No appeals against their grades were recorded, but were expected, (the better the grade, the sooner repatriated in theory). Despite this, it was stated that relationships between the pows and British staff was good.

40% of the pows were ‘youth’ (under 25). They were not seen as a problem and no special activities were arranged for them.

The standard list of re-education activities was very similar to the previous report. Differences:

Newspapers – very few German and Swiss papers were received.

Library – 900 books, 400 in German.

Films - Gaumont British films were received as well as YMCA. GB charged 6d (6 pence) for entry and this was considered to be too expensive by most.

Camp magazine – 300 copies weekly. There were shortages of paper – here and elsewhere.

Information room – newly set up, showed displays of texts and pictures supplied by PID. Last exhibition was on “Germany Today.”

Other camp activities –

Religion – Protestant padre, Adolf Buchman (A), a former officer. Church services were well attended and the padre visited hostels. RC Padre, Breithaupt, visited from Camp 135 monthly, which was inadequate.

Education – small classes for Latin, Russian, French, English, Advanced English, Book-keeping, Commerce and Rural economy.

Entertainments – A good orchestra, but there was no large hall, so it had to repeat performances. Theatre group were preparing a nativity play. The were marionette shows. Some pows carved wood and an exhibition of this was put on and toured the hostels.

**14/15 January 1947** – English Inspector’s Report. Strength 1025

No further reports in the file.

Known Camp Commandants

c.1947 Lt Col Christopher Castlehow Smythe, O.B.E. M.C. from the Royal Hampshire Regiment.

**Postal items:** A postcard to Obersch. Emil Sommer. B 193850 at POW Camp No 88, Mortimer Camp was sent from Itzehoe, in Northern Germany and dated 19 Dec 1948. This is a strange item as all pow camps had closed by this time – perhaps just a mistake, or that the pow remained in the UK? (Thanks to Pete Feeney).

**After the camp:** 2024 -SU 678 635 is a field.

**Further Information:**

National Archives FO 939/168 – 88 Working Camp, Mortimer Camp, Reading, Berkshire. Dated 1945-1946

Picture postcard above from : '*Prigionieri Italiani in Gran Bretagna (1940 - 1947)'* by Luciano Previato

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

**Camp numbers:**

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

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Mortimer |  |  | Cap 1000 | 859 | 875 | 801 | 696 | 664 |
| Kempshott |  |  | Italian |  |  | 62 | 68 | ? |
| Pangbourne |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Rotherfield Greys |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Winchfield | With C57 | | Italian |  | 69 | 59 | 69 | ? |
| Alton |  |  | Italian |  |  |  |  |  |
| Theale |  |  | Italian | 52 (1) | 50 | 42 | 38 | ? |
| Thedden Grange, Alton |  |  | German 100 / C41 | See Camp 294 | | | | |
| Harwood |  |  |  |  |  | 90 | 100 | ? |
| Billets |  |  |  | c.65 | 90 | 110 | 99 | 103 (2) |
| Total |  |  | Cap 1350 | 976 | 1084 | 1164 | 1070 | 1025 |

(1) This entry was called ‘Beeling’ rather than Theale – I do not know why, but distance given and size of hostel makes it almost certainly Theale.

(2) + 2 detached, no details given.

**Hostels**

**Alton**

Fishers Camp and Thedden Grange Camp – see 294 - were both given the address of Alton. Thedden Grange (German) was listed at the same time as Alton (Italian) in September 1945, so this hostel was either Fishers or a separate hostel. ???

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|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Alton |  |  | Mixed I/G |  |  |  |  |  |

**Harwood** Unknown location, possibly Harwood House near Hambledon, Hampshire; SU 645 138?

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Harwood |  |  |  |  |  | 90 | 100 | ? |

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| **Kempshott**, Basingstoke, Hants. Memories place pows in the grounds at Kempshott House – SU 598 474. Possibly the group of buildings shown just to N of the house.  The gap in 1946 may be explained if it held Italian pows – these were ignored in PID reports.   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 | | Kempshott | Italian |  | Italian |  |  | 62 | 68 | ? | |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1961 |

**Pangbourne**. [Camp 246 Basildon House, Pangbourne was listed nearby].

1943 – Listed as a hostel for Italian pows.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Pangbourne |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Rotherfield Greys**, Henley on Thames, Oxon.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Rotherfield Greys |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Theale (Green).** Memories place it just S, where the Fox and Hounds pub is – SU 649 698.

**4/1946** – Hostel leader; Doering (C).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Theale |  |  | Italian | 52 (1) | 50 | 42 | 38 | ? |

**Thedden Grange**

**September 1945** – Listed with Mortimer Camp 88 – Germans, capacity 100.

**1945** - Listed with Camp 41 – must have been just a brief time. (Progress report 154 – FO 939/383)

**1946 >** - Then with Camp 294.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ? | 1943 | 1944 | 9/45 | 4/46 | 6/46 | 8/46 | 11/46 | 1/47 | 5/47 | 7/47 | 9/47 | 11/47 | 12/47 |
| Thedden Grange |  |  |  | With C88 / 41 | See Camp 294 | | | | | |  |  |  |  |

**Winchfield**, Hook, Hampshire. (Camp 588 Shapley House was also listed for Winchfield, Hants.)

**1943 / 1944** – Listed as a hostel for Italian pows attached to Merrow Camp 57.

The 1946 gap is possibly due to it holding Italians – which were ignored in PID reports.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 4/1946 | 6/1946 | 10/1946 | 12/1946 | 1/1947 |
| Winchfield | With C57 | | Italian |  | 69 | 59 | 69 | ? |