**Camp 107** **- Penleigh Camp, Wookey Hole, nr Wells, Somerset**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Labour Camp. 107. Penleigh Camp, Wookey Hole, Wells, Somerset.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1947 Camp List** | | | | | | | |
| 107(G.W.C.) | Penleigh Camp, Wookey Hole, Wells, Somerset | S. | Priswar, Wells | Wells 468/9 | Wookey | Lt.Col.A.A.Crook, D.S.O. | 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 |
| ST 537 463 | 182 | 107 | Penleigh Camp, Wookey Hole, Wells | Somerset | 4 | German Working Camp | STANDARD type. Site occupied by housing |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Location:** 1.5 km NW of Wells.  **Before the camp:** Farmland  **Pow Camp:** Listed as an Italian working camp / labour battalion to at least 1945, then a German Working Camp.  The site had a standard layout with a main pow compound (B), with guards’ huts and offices at the front (A). Buildings included a water tower, 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.  Somerset HER:  “*The Ministry of Works intended to requisition 20 acres of land on 6 March 1943 and the City Council Water Committee was informed that the camp would accommodate 500 prisoners with 100 staff, needing 15,000 gallons of water a day. Building commenced immediately and the first Italian prisoners arrived in the middle of year. The administration area was to the north with some 30 huts for prisoners to the south where there* |  |  |
| 1946 - [raf\_3g\_tud\_uk\_24\_v\_5251 - Aerial Photo | Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/record/raf_3g_tud_uk_24_v_5251) | Ordnance Survey 1960 |

*were also latrines, showers, a laundry and a drying room. The cookhouse, local produce store, tailor's, cobbler's and barber's shops were located in the NW corner of the prisoners’ compound with two dining rooms and an institute to their east. Beyond were linked huts that formed the reception station and hospital. There was also a carpenter's shop, but no chapel; a priest visited and later prisoners were able to attend the Roman Catholic church in Chamberlain Street. Most of the Italians were repatriated by mid 1946 but some returned to the area. They were replaced by German prisoners returning from America and others were transferred from the more primitive conditions at Stoberry in early 1947. The prisoners were repatriated later in the year and the camp was used to lodge Irish agricultural workers*.” <https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/record/17564>

**1943 and 5 May 1944** - Hostel listed for Italian pows from this camp, (WO 32/10737): Yatton, Bristol.

**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, (+ Pioneer Corps Group), (WO 32/10737). The Italians were recorded as non-co-operators.

**1 August 1945** - an urgent memorandum was sent to this camp, and others, about maintaining records of Italians who were classed as ‘co-operators’.

**15 September 1945** - Hostels listed for pows from this camp, (WO 32/10737): Brymore (School), Cannington, Somerset / Charlton Horethorne, Sherborn, Dorset.

**September 1945** - Appendix to HQ Southern Command War Diary:

Penleigh, Wells – Italian labour camp – capacity 650 – 121/976675

Italian hostels – Yatton, Cannington, Charlton Horethorne – total cap 500

German hostel – Westhill (Wincanton) – cap 100 – 143/319822

****One of the Italian pows, Gaetano Celestra, made a 4m high, concrete and wire statue of Romulus and Remus at Beechbarrow House (NGR ST 570 490).

*“Whilst at the camp, Celestra, a mason and builder by trade was employed locally to repair boundary walls. He was granted permission to build the statue with help from fellow POWs during his spare time…. In 1945 the monument was erected alongside the A39, at Pen Hill in recognition of the kind way that the prisoners had been treated. After the War, Celestra settled in the area and continued working as a builder and stonemason…”* (Somerset Heritage record).

**Autumn 1946** – a new Commandant; Lt Col A A Crook. Camp leader; Hellwig.

**December 1946** - Camp magazine started – “*Penleigh Post*” - printed in runs of 500.

**August 1947** – recorded as a Satellite Camp / hostel for Goathurst Camp 44.

**30 December 1947** – Satellite Camp / Hostel closed.

Known Camp Commandants:

1946 Lieutenant Colonel A A Crook, D.S.O. Arthur Ainslie Crook, born 1899. He served a long, distinguished military career with the Northamptonshire Regiment, late Royal Artillery, and was awarded a DSO for his gallant command of 6th (West African) Infantry Brigade during the crossing of the Kaladan River in December 1944. He was also awarded British War and Victory Medals, Africa Star, Burma Star, and the Greek Military Cross, before becoming a Military Knight of Windsor (1963), He died in 1981 - his medals came up for sale in 2014. Some papers relating to his career before becoming a commandant are held by the IWM.

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< In use 1943, Italian letter-sheet to Italy.

**After the camp:** Used for emergency housing.The site was taken over by a branch of EMI Electronics. The huts were gradually demolished and new buildings replaced them. The factory based here closed down. 2019 residential estate.

**Further Information:**

Camp magazine, December 1946 - [Penleigh Post : Lager 107 Wells/Somerset - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/112831/) (foreword written by the Commandant).

Book: Davis, F. *A History of Penleigh: From Italian Prisoner-of-War Camp to 21st Century Technology*. (2011). Copy in Local Studies collection at Somerset Heritage Centre. Class T WEL3 DAV

**POW NUMBERS**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Open |  |  | With other camps |  |  | Unknown |  |  | Not open |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1947 |
| Main |  |  | cap.650 - It | Satellite to c44 - 590 |
| Yatton, Bristol. |  |  | \* - It | Not listed with C44 |
| Cannington |  |  | \* - It | Hostel to C44 from 7/1946 |
| Charlton Horethorne |  |  | \* - It | Not listed with C44 |
| Westhill |  |  | cap 100 (German) | Not listed with C44 |
| Billets |  |  |  |  |
| TOTALS |  |  |  |  |

\* The 3 hostels had a total capacity of 500.

**Hostels**

**Cannington**, Brymore (House / School), Somerset – in the grounds of Brymore House; NGR ST 246 395 – now Brymore Academy.

In 1943 the 535th Automatic Weapons battalion of the US Army was billeted in Brymore School house and grounds while they prepared for D Day.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1947 |
| Cannington |  |  | \* - It | Hostel to C44 from 7/1946 |

**Charlton Horethorne**, Sherborn, Dorset

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1947 |
| Charlton Horethorne |  |  | \* - It | Not listed with C44 |

**Westhill,** (Wincanton) – [Local memories place it where King Arthur’s School is now – ST 703 285].

**1947** – Listed as Wincanton with Motcombe Park Camp 47.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1947 |
| Westhill |  |  | cap 100 (German) | With Camp 47 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| **Yatton,** Bristol. NGR ST 436 651, occupied an area approximately 60 x 50m  Site survey - <http://www.ycccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/POW%20CAMP%20Y8.pdf>  Local memories - <https://yattonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Yatton-at-war-1939-45s.pdf>   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1947 | | Yatton, Bristol. |  |  | \* - It | Not listed with C44 |   **Ordnance Survey 1961 >** |  |