**Camp 40** **- Somerhill Camp, Somerhill, Tonbridge, Kent**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Labour Camp. 40. Somerhill Camp, Somerhill, Tonbridge, Kent.

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| **1947 Camp List** | | | | | | | |
| 40(G.W.C.) | Somerhill Camp, Somerhill, Tonbridge, Kent | E. | Priswar, Tonbridge | Tonbridge 170 | Tonbridge | Lt.Col.R.G.Ord. | 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 |
| TQ 666 530 | 188 | 40 | Somerhill Camp, Somerhill, Tonbridge | Kent | 4 | German Working Camp |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location:** The NGR above is incorrect. The centre of the site is TQ 596 452. Shown on the 1960 map as ‘Somerhill Bungalows’.  **Before the camp:** The western part of Somerhill Park, (though originally marked as a site at Boxes Farm, which was a little to the East near to Tudeley).  **POW Camp:** The site was accepted as a pow camp in December 1941, it was opened in 1942.  Listed as an Italian working camp / labour battalion to 1944/45, then a German working camp. Mainly wooden huts.  **15 July 1942** - International Red Cross visit - Italian prisoners, capacity 575.  **1 April 1943** – IRC visit - Italian prisoners, capacity 750. On this second visit the suicide of a pow on **8 March 1943** was recorded. (Prisoners of war camps in the United Kingdom – reports FO 916/581)  The pow who committed suicide was 26 year old Italian soldato Angelomaria Notaro, (Service No. T/57715). He was buried at Tonbridge Cemetery, War Graves Group Section S Grave 19.  **1943** – Hostels for Italian pows; Borough Green – Fairwarp - Ferndale Road, Tunbridge Wells.  **May 1944 and November 1944** - The camp was listed as an Italian Labour Battalion under the South East Command area, (WO 32/10737).  As demand for camps for German pows increased rapidly after D-day, Italians were sent to other camps or billets prior to repatriation. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1960 |

|  |
| --- |
| 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. |

Reports on Somerhill frequently had comments at total variance regarding Commandant Ord and Interpreter Officer White. It was recorded that Commandant Ord was / was not supporting re-education. Lt White was very good, or was not suited to the job.

**July 1945** – PID Progress Report 124 noted a temporary tented extension for 150 pows. (FO 939/383).

**15 to 25 July 1945** – three members of the ‘segregation section’ carried out political screening with less than 50% of the pows. Strength 13 officers, 2938 OR.

**14 September 1945** – PID visit to review re-education activities. Strength 1834.

Commandant: Lt Col R G Ord. Camp leader: St/Fw Rudolf Barkholdt

Interpreter Officer: Lt W N White Deputy C/L: Gefr Erich Peinelt

The main compound had some huts with another 800 pows accommodated in tents.

The standard list of re-education activities was being developed. Activities took place in two dining and recreation huts with benches, tables and one blackboard. The visitor reported on:

Lectures – these had started, 3 so far.

Films – 1 a month. The film about German concentration camps had been shown to the pows.

English teaching - 233 pows taking 2 one-hour English lessons per week in 4 classes, with 1 teacher – 72 beginners / 142 intermediate / 21 advanced. Dictionaries were needed, the pows would pay for these.

Other activities –

Religion – 950 pows attending Lutheran services on Sundays. There were 850 RC pows, but no priest. The chapel in the camp could hold 200 men seated, or 400 standing.

**11 December 1945** – English Inspector’s Report. Strength 1834. Only 33 pows still in tents.

English teaching - 292 pows with two teachers. The Interpreter Officer recommended that one teacher be removed as he was unreliable and a poor teacher.

Other educational classes – German, Russian, French, History, Mathematics, Arithmetic, Physics, Bookkeeping, Shorthand.

**25 February 1946** – English Inspector’s Report. Camp strength not listed.

The Commandant displayed no interest in the visitor, but the Interpreter Officer was welcoming.

The camp was now fully hutted. It had a theatre capable of seating 500 and many teaching facilities. There was a camp orchestra.

The number of pows studying English was decreasing – the main reason was the teacher mentioned in the last report; it was again recommended that he be replaced.

**7 March 1946** – 200 pows arrived from camps in the USA. The next report stated that they had settled down and given no trouble. This was unusual, in other camp reports similar pows suffered very low morale as they had been mistakenly informed they were to be returned to Germany.

**25/28 March 1946** – Mr T Lehnert from PID reviewed re-education, vet billetees and “*Compulsory declaration on oath*.” Strength 3 officers, 1853 OR (not including Halstead).

Commandant: Lt Col R G Ord Camp leader: O.Fw Barkholdt (B).

Interpreter: Lt W N White Deputy C/L: Gefr Peinelt (A)

German M.O.: O.Arzt Meyer (Est C).

Comments on the British staff were almost a complete reversal from before – in this report the Commandant, “*fully understands and appreciates PID aims*” – whereas the IO gave little assistance and, “*does not know anything about the camp although he has been I.O here for over a year*.”

The Commandant, and in particular Lt White, were criticised; “*The C/L… and his deputy… practically run the camp according to their own ideas as the IO does not take any interest. Liaison between the CO and the compound is poor*.” It was considered that the 2 Germans had far too much power and had become dictatorial. A camp committee was being elected to oversee activities and it was hoped this might have a moderating influence – “*but the situation will be unsatisfactory as long as Lt White remains*.”

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A+ | A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C | Unknown |
|  | 10 | 110 | 2 | 4 | 646 | 10 | 234 | 839 |

The estimates of political attitudes and progress made by the IO was dismissed as “*valueless*.” Similarly, the opinion of the C/L was dismissed. A further, rather dubious comment stated, *“there is hardly a man in the camp who is shrewd enough to estimate the political complexion*.” The antagonism of the visitor was clear, but was it justified? He did concede that there was some political progress being made and there were very few communists in the camp.

Morale overall was “*pretty low*” due to; uncertainty over repatriation, talk of war with Russia, very little news from home, conditions in Germany, and the belief that Nazis had been released in Germany. About 200 pows were Sudeten or from areas of Czechoslovakia which rejected them, they had particular concerns for their families being deported as well as their own future.

Positive factors for morale were seen as; removal of tents for accommodation, some sick pows being repatriated, the new camp committee, entertainments in camp.

Declaration on oath – “*every new arrival at the camp has to fill up a declaration very similar to those used by Segregation teams… this form is handed to the C/L who, of course takes notice of its contents. Completed forms are said to be held by the IO under lock and key but I think that it is quite possible and indeed probable that the C/L is allowed to look up particulars of any PW.”* The, ‘*think that is quite possible,’* shows the visitor had no evidence. He had a disagreement with the commandant over this matter.

“*Youth Problem*” - 235 pows were aged under 20, and 353 between 21 and 25 – “*Nothing has so far been undertaken regarding their re-education.”* A youth committee was being formed.

Visitors from PID were often zealous concerning re-education activities and critical over any lack of active support by British staff. However, the camps were under the control of the War Office, and their purpose was to hold pows and set them to work when possible. The visitor was from PID under the Foreign Office having the aim of promoting re-education activities – the British staff in the camps had no obligation to do so. This is not to say that a camp was ‘bad’ if it did not promote these particular activities; there were many camps where welfare, entertainment, games, sport and the pow’s personal occupations took priority and produced a positive atmosphere. Some comments about Somerhill suggest that entertainment, games and sport were of far more importance than re-education.

Not surprisingly, the visitor produced a list of “*handicaps*” within the camp to prevent the development of the re-education activities he wished for.

* “*lack of initiative and interest of the IO*.”
* lack of suitable rooms – though 3 more huts were being built for activities.
* lack of capable pows.
* dictatorial powers of the C/L and deputy.
* an unpopular study leader.
* “*very low average of intelligence.”*

The standard list of re-education activities was given –

Wochenpost and Ausblick – separate appendix

Newspapers – a range of British papers received. Very few German papers received from PID.

Library – 1300 books, more to be bought from the camp welfare fund. (These were built up mainly from sales in the camp canteen).

Lectures - regular.

Discussion groups – none other than through press reviews.

Films – none had been supplied by PID, but YMCA were supplying weekly films which were very popular.

Wireless – not able to receive German stations. BBC pow broadcasts eagerly listened to.

Camp magazine – none

Press review – stopped. Hoped to restart.

English Instruction – 165 pupils, 6 classes.

Information room – expected to open soon.

Other activities – the range of these show the main focus of pow activity in this camp;

Religion – 130 protestant pows attended Sunday services, 15/20 attended weekly Bible study. Youth meetings only attracted 8/10. Padre O/Lt Sattig (Est C) was not popular – he wore his officers’ uniform in church which caused bitter comments.

300/350 RC pows attended Sunday services, 20/25 attended twice weekly evening services and a similar number at weekly youth meetings. RC padre San.Fw Borgas (A) was a good influence in the camp.

Education – small classes were held for Book-keeping (24 pows); French (37); Russian (27); History (6); Shorthand (10); Maths (16); German (14). New classes in a wide range of subjects were expected to start.

Theatre – variety performances held in the camp theatre. The visitor stated, “*They have no re-educational value.”*

Orchestra and choir – orchestra with 8 members played light music and swing; a 30 member choir.

Other – Chess club of 200. Billiard table, table tennis and cards. Football is very popular.

In his conclusions, the visitor could not resist having another go at the IO calling him the, “*biggest handicap*” and recommended that he be replaced.

There was no mention of vetting billetees.

**5 June 1946** – English Inspector’s Report by Mr C M Griffiths. Strength 2053. 73 pows in the main camp studying English in 3 classes – there were 292, 6 months prior to this.

One of the teachers was considered to be unsuitable; “*Claessens, who, while having a very good knowledge of English, is a very arrogant type and altogether too young for the job of teacher. He should be screened as soon as possible.”* He was not listed in the next English Inspector’s Report.

Major contrasts to the re-education reports; “*Morale here is very high, mail is good while the camp sports an orchestra, a theatre/cinema, an information room, special huts used solely as classrooms, etc. A very contented camp*.”

**24 June 1946** – Mr Lehnert returned to survey re-education and screen billetees. Strength 3 officers, 2883 OR.

Only change to senior staff – an extra M.O.; O/St/Arzt Hammel (est C). The IO was still in post.

There were still 1189 pows with unknown screening.

The visitor stated that the Commandant shows a great interest in the welfare of pows. Then goes on to the IO; *“Unfortunately liaison with the compound is very poor* [previously blamed on the CO] *as the IO is only interested in censoring PW’s letters and singularly ill informed about the compound… the little information provided was worse than useless.”*

For a time between March and June, the camp had been used as a transit camp and so there had been many changes of pow. More pows had arrived from USA, but also from camps in Canada and Belgium – conditions in Belgian pow camps had been very poor. Morale was still considered to be low, and the new arrivals had not helped.

There was a repetition of the claim that the C/L and deputy ran the camp and had become dictatorial. The newly elected committee had, “*shown little desire”* to influence camp life, and the Commandant was ill-informed. The visitor clearly wanted the C/L to be replaced, but the Commandant, who had the power, said no.

“*Youth Problem*” – about 650 youth (under-25). The newly formed youth committee had little success in stimulating interest in re-education activities.

The standard list of re-education activities was given with little change from the previous report. The wireless had been improved and there was now an Information Room which needed new material to display.

Other activities – Protestant attendance had declined due to the unpopularity of the padre. RC attendance had also fallen as the popular padre had been repatriated. RC services were being given by a British military chaplain. Entertainments were as recoded before. Chess had 300 enthusiasts.

**22 September 1946** – English Inspector’s Report by Mr J H Dagnall. Strength 3026. 94 pupils in 5 classes.

A further major contrast to the re-education reports – “*British staff are not very co-operative excepting the excellent Interpreter Officer who bears a heavy share of official duties, and is much in demand.”*

**29 October to 6 November 1946** – another visit by the Segregation Section.

Change to Interpreters: S/Sgt Hamilton and S/Sgt Newman. Strength; 9 officers, 2680 OR.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Simplified screening in use: | A | B | C | Unknown |
|  | 134 | 2024 | 324 | 198 |

This was a high number of C grade pows. “*The majority of the men I screened were ready enough to condemn National Socialism on general grounds, but very few had any positive political opinions.”* The commandant requested that 2 pows be rescreened –

Camp leader San.St.Feldw Rudolf Barkholdt – A member of the police force since 1924. His grading remained as B.

M.O. Oberarzt Christfried Meyer. He had originally been graded as A, after further interview in July 1945 he was regraded as B-. In March 1946 it was estimated that he was C (Nazi) - however, he was again graded as B- with the comment; “*An opportunist.”*

The pows stated in general that they were too tired after working all day to participate in re-education activities.

**11/13 February 1947** – English Inspector’s Report. Strength 2451. 82 pupils in 5 classes. Bad weather was affecting the employment of pows.

**18 March 1947** – There was a House of Commons question over a misunderstanding in this camp:

*“Mr. Stokes asked the Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that at Camp No. 40, for prisoners of war, at Tunbridge, Kent, notice was recently posted advising the prisoners that they could write to and receive letters from anybody within the United Kingdom, except newspapers and Members of Parliament; and how this notice came to be posted, as it is contrary to his own instructions.*

*Mr. Bellenger - A War Office regulation states that prisoners of war may not write to Government Departments, newspapers, periodicals, private or public enterprises. A reproduction of this regulation translated into German has been posted as a notice in No. 40 Camp. I understand that a prisoner of war at this camp misinterpreted the notice as meaning that communication with Members of Parliament was forbidden. It has now been explained to him that this is not so.”*

HC Deb 18 March 1947 vol 435 c188

**10-12 May 1947** – Mr R P Fenwick carried out a re-education survey. Strength 4 officers, 2704 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col R G Ord Camp leader: H/Fw Moritz Kieres (B+)

Interpreter: Capt P H Blake Deputy C/L: None

German M.O.: O.Arzt Christfried Meyer (B-) / O.St Arzt Hammel (B-)

The new IO was “*a highly nervous man, with whom it is difficult to talk, he is always too busy doing half-a-dozen other things at once*…”

The repatriation of the former pow camp leader was seen to be of great benefit to the camp. The method of his leaving was questioned as he had been repatriated after being graded ‘A,’ which was considered to be highly dubious. The new camp leader had been deputy C/L.

Further simplification of screening figures: A 107; B 2601. Approximately 750 pows repatriated to date.

Morale was considered to have considerably improved owing to; 1. Relaxation of restrictions and gradual acceptance by the civilian population in Tonbridge, 2. Improved weather resulting in full employment, 3. Recent screening and upgrading of many pows, (better grades in theory meant earlier repatriation).

Although there were less restrictions placed on pows over leaving camp and fraternizing with civilians, there was still resentment over petty rules, examples – pows who bought civilian shoes were not allowed to wear them when walking out, those who had bought football boots were told they would not be allowed to take them back to Germany.

**27/31 May 1947** – English Inspector’s report. Strength 2488. 41 pupils in 5 classes.

10 pows attended WEA discussions in Tonbridge. A group had visited Tonbridge Grammar School. There were still many different education classes – a painting class had started in the main camp.

**18-20 September 1947** – English Inspector’s Report. Strength 2205. Just 15 pupils in 1 class in the main camp. There were others who studied privately.

Additional visits were being made to Toc H in Tonbridge, and about 30 pows visited the vicarage for discussions every 2 months.

The study leader at the main camp had been ‘Baumgärtner,’ when he left it was found that he had often submitted fictitious reports on non-existent educational activities, and made existing activities more successful than was the case.

**Various days September / October 1947** – O Nash carried out a survey of re-education. Strength; 11 officers, 2161 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col R G Ord Camp leader: H/Fw Moritz Kieres (B+)

Interpreter: Capt P H Blake Deputy C/L: Fw Gerhard Wilde (B+)

German M.O.: O.Arzt Christfried Meyer (B-) / A/Arzt Walter Schmidt (B)

The commandant was not “*greatly interested in re-education*” he left this to the IO. Capt Blake was of Austrian origin - comment repeated that he was, *“highly nervous and always busy man…”* Both men were recorded as “*rather impatient with the PW, who consider they are hard done by.*”

Camp leader; aged 32, a tailor, “*co-operative.”*

Screening had been further simplified and was no longer of much value: A 7; B 2165.

Morale was rather low. 400 pows had arrived from a different camp (unnamed) that had been run by the RAF where life had been easier and with little supervision – hence some feeling “*hard done by*.” Other adverse affects – long captivity, bad news from home, little attention paid to re-education.

The standard list of re-education activities was given:

Newspapers – Satisfactory supply of English newspapers. ‘Fair quantities’ of German newspapers.

Library – amply provided. Mereworth satellite had its own library.

Lectures – Regular, varying numbers attending.

Discussion groups – Only at Mereworth satellite.

Films – Regular from YMCA and Travelling Films.

Wireless – Satisfactory at all sites, pow news and BBC listened to, *“but all other programmes are of a purely light nature*.”

Camp Magazine – ‘Produced at Halstead which had the necessary equipment. “*Quality is fairly high*.” The editor, Werner Ruk (A) was suspected by the IO as being an *“ill-disguised Nazi*” – however the visitor stated, “*I think he is useful to us and that his grading is not unduly inaccurate*.”

Press review – None

English teaching – slow during summer months.

Information room – showed exhibitions of text and pictures sent by CIGA.

Outside contacts - Very few formal arrangements. There were visits to the camp and hostels by Salvation Army bands. Some pows attended WEA meetings at Tunbridge Wells. Some visited school exhibitions at Tonbridge School. Many pows had developed their own contacts with local civilians.

Religion – Well catered for. RC Padre, Ogfr Josef Koeckemann (A), aged 32. Protestant padre, Oblt Otto Sattig (B) – had recently published a circular of anti-British extracts, a special report had been issued about this on 8 August.

Education – “*There are a few educational classes of no importance.”* If an activity was not linked to ‘re-education,’ then it was usually considered to be of no importance to the visitors from PID.

Entertainments – theatre group performed mainly variety shows; bands at main, Mereworth satellite and Horns Lodge.

Sport – “*ample facilities*.”

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

**16 December 1947** – English Inspector’s report. Total strength 1680. 41 pupils in 4 classes at main camp.

A solicitor, Mr Clapham, was visiting to give six talks on the English legal system.

**30 December 1947 – 3 January 1948** – Oliver Nash returned for another re-education survey. Strength; 4 officers, 1915 OR.

Only change to senior personnel – new deputy Karl Weber, previously hostel leader at Horns Lodge.

With increased repatriations the pows were, “*fairly happy*.” It was stated that entertainment was preferred to education. Pows were trying to obtain goods to send or take to Germany. Christmas leave had been a positive experience. An adverse factor towards Britain arose from, “*grumblings from Germany about maladministration*.” Anti-communist feelings were strong.

Activities were affected by repatriations, but there were no significant changes.

This was the last report in the National Archive files.

The Tonbridge Historical Society published extracts from a diary kept by Vinzenz Fetzer, a German pow. After being held at Merevale Camp 195 and Penkridge Camp 194, he was transferred to Somerhill on **10 April 1945**. He worked mainly on local farms, sometimes travelling 35km by ‘omnibus’. For a while, he worked at ‘*Churchill’s place,’* Chartwell.

His diary recorded how important it was for POWs to receive news from home. Entry for 29 September 1945 – ‘*Today we wrote a "Missing Persons" card. Since then, I’ve been very restless. What will happen? Some change in the camp. Some pictures were very good when one thinks by what means they were created. The camp choir and band gave us a good evening. In a talk, we got to hear news from home. It wasn’t to give us courage, we are a defeated slave people*.’

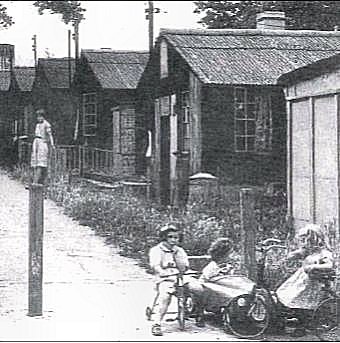
He noted on 27 October 1945 that, ‘*Some men have already received answers to their cards, so far so good.’…* but, Vinzenz did not receive a reply until 6 December; ‘*With new courage I begin this page. Today I received an answer to my card – all well. I couldn’t expect more. My belief, my hope – not disappointed. No mention of the house. Now all anxiety is at an end. My clover leaf has brought me luck*.’

Other cards and letters were sent and received on a fairly regular basis after that which lifted his spirits a little. However, on 29 December he wrote: ‘*Christmas is over. Thank God, many a one will say. It’s precisely this family festival which weighs heaviest on the mood of the prisoners. It was worst for those who still have no news from home and for those from the Russian-controlled zone who up to now are not allowed to write*.’ Post from the Russian zone did not arrive until 27 January 1946.

Towards the end of his captivity, Vinzenz lived for 18 months at ‘Horns Lodge Hostel’, which was probably Horns Lodge Farm, off Shipbourne Road (TQ 591 499).

Known Camp Commandants;

c.1947 Lieutenant Colonel R G Ord. (from the Royal Regiment of Artillery).

**After the camp:** The fate of the Camp was raised in Parliament:

***“****Mr. G. Williams asked the Minister of Works if he has decided on the future of the ex-prisoners-of-war camp at Somerhill, Tonbridge.*

*Mr. Durbin - Yes. The whole of this camp is required to accommodate civilian agricultural workers*.” (House of Commons, **2 March 1948,** Volume 448).

There is a story of squatters attempting to move in to the camp in 1948 and the commandant ‘locking them in’.

< The camp became known as ‘Somerhill Bungalows’ for the civilians who used the huts as temporary accommodation.

Later, the site was cleared and the land is now used by Weald of Kent Grammar School.

**Further information:**

[The Website of the Tonbridge Historical Society](http://www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/archives/war-diary.html) – extended diary of life at Camp 40 and an associated hostel.

National Archives – FO 939/122 40 Working Camp, Somerhill Camp, Tonbridge, Kent. Dated 1945-1948. Used above.

National Archives - FO 1120/212 – ‘Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 40 to 42.’ Used above.

Catalogue Link - [5 - Register of Deaths of the Evangelical congregation in Camp No. 40 in Tonbridge, Kent - 1945-1948](https://www.thcatalogue.org.uk/calmview/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=W%2fSGG%2fA%2f5%2f5%2f5)

Camp Magazine - 1 October 1946; [Somerhill Rundschau : P.o.W. Camp 40 Tonbridge/Kent und Angeschlossene Hostels - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/112862/)

Camp and hostels + number of pows where known, (many figures were rounded):

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not open |  | Unknown |  | Open |  | With another camp |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1942 | 1943 | 7/45 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Main |  |  |  | 1801 | 1790 | 1661 | 1597 | 1732\*\* | 1276 | 1027 | 962 | 950\*\* | 980 |
| Borough Green |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | With 117 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fairwarp |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Tunbridge Wells |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Halstead |  |  |  | 33 | 44 | (60)\* | 127 | 151 | 109 | 105 | 90 | 75 | 79 |
| Hamptons |  |  |  | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | 195 | 198 | 197 | 160 |  |  |  |  |
| Horns Lodge |  |  |  | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | 300 | 310 | 253 | 207 | 185 |  |  |
| Mereworth Sat. |  |  |  | C267 | | | 600 | 546 | 466 | 611 | 550 | 510 | 582 |
| Mereworth Woods |  |  |  | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | 90 | 58 | 191 | 140 | 145 | 135 |
| Grove Wood |  |  |  |  |  | With C238 | | | | 168 | 103 |  |  |
| Gaza Barracks | Army barracks and storage site | | | | | | | | | 28 |  |  | C117? |
| Billets |  |  |  |  |  |  | 64 | ? | 103 | 119 | 175 | ? | 143 |
| Total | 575 cap. | 750 cap | 2951 | 1834 | 1834 | 1856 | 2886 | 3026 | 2451 | 2488 | 2205 | 1680 | 1919 |

\*Not included in total \*\* including billetees. \*\*\* sites listed in July 1945 report, then missing in next few reports, probably administered by another camp (267?) during this time.

**Satellite Camp**

**Mereworth Castle –** Previously Independent Camp 267.

**July 1945 –** recorded as a satellite camp.

**June 1946** – Again, recorded as a satellite camp. Camp leader; Fw Biehl (A).

**May 1947** – Camp leader O.Fa Bohlmann (B+). Interpreter S/Sgt Hamiliton, previously listed at the main camp.

**October 1947** – Camp leader; Fhr Kurt Bohlmann (B+), “*efficient and co-operative*.” General good morale. Rev Main from Mereworth Church gave lectures on English history.

**January 1948** – same camp leader.

**March 1948** – listed as a hostel for Walderslade Camp 117.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1942 | 1943 | 7/45 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Mereworth Sat. |  |  |  | C267 | | | 600 | 546 | 466 | 611 | 550 | 510 | 582 |

**Hostels**

**Borough Green**

**1943** - Hostel for Italian pows

Did this site become – ‘Labour Camp 629, Broom Cottage Camp, Borough Green, Sevenoaks, Kent.’

**8/1946** Listed with Walderslade Camp 117

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1942 | 1943 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Borough Green |  |  |  |  |  |  | With C117 |  |  |  |  |  |

**Fairwarp “***Just leaving the main village, heading east on The Street, tucked away in among trees is two dilapidated buildings that formed the POW camp*.”

**1943** - Hostel for Italian pows.

**7 April 1943** – Entry in Ashdown Forest Board minute book – “*9. PRISONER OF WAR CAMP AT FAIRWARP. Correspondence and requisition notices were produced from the Ministry of Works & Planning at Tunbridge Wells, which showed that a line of sewer pipes would be laid under a short section of the Forest at Fairwarp. RESOLVED that an annual acknowledgement of 2/6d be claimed and the legal costs.”*

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|  | 1942 | 1943 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Fairwarp |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Gaza Barracks. (Hildenborough).** 5 miles from the main camp.

**May 1947** – a small “*retaining force to prevent huts falling into the hands of squatters*.”

**4/1948** – Listed as a hostel with just 5 pows attached to Walderslade Camp 117.

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|  | 1942 | 1943 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Gaza Barracks | Army barracks and storage site. | | | | | | | | 28 |  |  |  |

**Grove Wood.** (**Limpsfield).** 17 miles from the main camp.

**May 1947** – Previously attached to Brook House Camp 238. “*Contains all the ‘bad hats’ of 238 and 40; Nobody is interested in English here*.”

Hostel leader; Ofw.Schauland (B) – aged 32, bricklayer, member of the SA; “*a man of regular NCO type, straightforward and honest…”* He had been specially selected when the camp was still attached to Camp 238, “*as a certain element had got very much out of hand and it was considered necessary to tighten up discipline there. This hostel still represents a problem and his job is not easy*.”

**September 1947** – Interest in lectures and some English classes started. **October 1947** – Same hostel leader.

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|  | 1942 | 1943 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Grove Wood |  |  |  |  | With C238 | | | | 168 | 103 |  |  |

**Halstead Place.** Near Sevenoaks. Hostel / Exploiting Centre. 12 / 16 miles from the main camp. A former private school. NGR TQ 483 615.

Former boarding school for girls.

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|  | Information concerning weapons was collected by Allied forces as they moved into Germany. This could be from equipment or documents. General information was sent back to the UK, and there were some missions and organizations set up to look for specific information, (notably atomic weapons, aircraft and rocket developments). Halstead was established to ‘exploit’ the information collected and co-ordinate the distribution of their findings. The location was selected as it was near to the British Armaments Research Department and the British Armaments Design Departments. It had sufficient office space for handling documents and drawings, and “*Hangarage for Equipment and Apparatus to be examined.”* The two British Armaments Departments supplied most of the operating staff, working alongside pows with technical expertise and/or the ability to translate documents. American Army and Navy research groups also had staff working at the Centre. |  |
| Halstead Place | Ordnance Survey 1950 |

**July 1945 –** hostel recorded in segregation report. I think at this time it was being prepared for use.

**August 1945** – hostel officially opened as exploiting centre. Selected pows – technical experts and linguists - from various camps were transferred here.

**December 1945** – 28 pows studying English. French lessons also given.

**February 1946** – A high level of language skills meant that several pows were suitable for teaching English.

**13 April 1946** – Report issued about the hostel. Referred to as Halstead Exploitation Centre. Strength: 54 O.R. / 6 officers / 3 civilians = 63.

Officer i/c: Lt.Col Mohring, 2nd i/c Major Surbeck.

“*PW who are all of high intellectual standard are engaged on very secret work of great importance for the Ministry of Supply.*

*According to information available at the Hostel there are 31 political gradings “high” and 22 political gradings “fair,” and 10 PW used as orderlies whose gradings are not known. PW work side by side with British civilians and German civilians, at present about 20, who are specifically brought over from Germany for a stay of 3 to 4 months.”*

Lt.Col Mohring was concerned about low morale and believed the pows should be treated differently due to the nature of their work. There were various causes for low morale:

* a lack of recreational facilities,
* the German civilian experts receiving more pay and freedoms – though some were regarded as “*good Nazis.”*
* the OR disliked that officers had a batman and kept themselves separate.
* *“PW see too much of each other and get on each other’s nerves.”*
* the pows stated that as they were entrusted with secret work, they should not be treated and guarded as ordinary PW.

The visitor seemed to agree with the officer i/c. He stated that the hostel started politically as white/light grey, but was “*slowly turning to dirty grey.”* He made various recommendations - below.

The welfare and housing conditions were good. Activities were listed:

Wochenpost and Ausblick – received

Newspapers – English dailies.

Wireless – poor, German stations could not be received.

Film – weekly showing with the hostel’s own projector, though the quality of films was not great.

Education - classes for English, French and Spanish.

Religion - RC and protestant padres visited the hostel.

Recommendations / Requirements:

1. Replace two pows – 1 was sick and unsuitable for the work; the other was mentally unstable and had tried to commit suicide. Both were disturbing “*elements*” and their removal had already been requested by Lt.Col Mohring.
2. Light literature – which could be in English; Magazines. German and Swiss newspapers.
3. Football, dartboard, playing cards and/or any other indoor games. Table tennis balls and bats (table available).
4. Lecturers to visit, they had only received one.

It was noted that all material should be sent direct to the hostel and not to camp 40.

**June 1946** – Hostel leader; Fw Einert (B), “*runs the hostel efficiently*,” but some pows had requested that he be replaced.

Morale still “*rather low”* for the same reasons as the last report. Some lectures were now being given.

**2 April 1947** – Question asked about screening in the House of Commons:

*“Mr. Stokes asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why screening of prisoners of war at Halstead Exploitation Centre, Tonbridge, Kent, promised since November, 1946, has not yet taken place; what is the reason for the delay; and whether he is aware that some of these prisoners attended the course at Wilton Park.  
  
Mr. J. Hynd - Prisoners are screened and graded before being sent to Halstead. I am aware that some of them have attended the course at Wilton Park.”* Hansard, 2 April 1947 vol 435 c303W

**May 1947** – Hostel leader; Uffz Glass (A)

**October 1947** – Hostel leader, Gefr Erich Bursch (B+), aged 48, a judiciary official from Berlin. Policeman until 1934. Had been a block warden with the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization (NSV).

Morale was still regarded as very low – “*the nature of their work gives them a feeling of superiority and arrogance which is not conducive to re-educational activity.”* The visitor recommended that all pows be re-screened and those of “*unsuitable outlook be removed irrespective of their linguistic ability*.”

Some pows attended meetings at Toc H and Labour Party at Dunton Green.

**January 1948** – same hostel leader.

**3/1948** – Listed as a hostel for Walderslade Camp 117

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|  | 1942 | 1943 | 7/45 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Halstead |  |  |  | 33 | 44 | (60)\* | 127 | 151 | 109 | 105 | 90 | 75 | 79 |

The building was demolished in the early 1950’s.

**Hampton House (Hamptons, Hadlow / Plaxtol** (nearby village)**).** 5 miles from the main camp. NGR TQ 621 522.

**July 1945 –** listed as a hostel.

**25 February 1946** – Hostel back with C40 with 195 pows transferred from the main camp.

**March 1946** – Hostel leader, U.Offz Schaffarzyk (A+); “*a sensible man*”.

“*Quite a happy atmosphere… in spite of lack of amenities. Morale is higher than in the main camp, PW enjoying better housing conditions, more freedom of movement and absence of barbed wire*.” Steps were being taken to increase the welfare fund and for padres to visit.

Activities – Wochenpost received; poor supply of books; wireless unsatisfactory; some English newspapers. Further activities hoped to start – English classes; press review; lectures; discussion groups. A piano was expected. Football and gardening was popular.

**June 1946** – Hostel leader O/Maat Schaefer (A+); “*excellent leadership”.*

Morale had improved. A youth discussion group of 40 met weekly. 5 British newspapers received. Press review on Sundays. Poor wireless reception. Two English classes for 40 pows. A French class for 10 pows. A small orchestra played light music nearly every evening.

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|  | | 1942 | 1943 | 7/45 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 | |
| Hamptons | |  |  |  | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | 195 | 198 | 197 | 160 | |  |  |  |  | |
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| **Horns Lodge (Hildenborough).** 3.5 miles from the main camp. NGR TQ 591 499.  **May 1946** – stated opened in this month, but not recorded if it had been previously linked to a different main camp.  **June 1946** – Hostel leader; O/Maat Weber (est B+); “*co-operative and sensible*.”  Morale growing due to pleasant housing conditions and freedom of movement in the large grounds. Satisfactory wireless. 2 English classes for 60 pows. No newspapers received, but on order.  **October 1947** – Same hostel leader. Aged 39, Kiel town employee. “*Unimaginative*.”   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | 1942 | 1943 | 7/45 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 | | Horns Lodge |  |  |  | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | 300 | 310 | 253 | 207 | 185 |  |  | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | |
| After the camp – one of the huts at Horns Lodge. | | | | |

**Mereworth Woods.** 8 miles from the main camp.

**July 1945 –** reported as opened early July.

**May 1947** – Hostel leader; Fw Wegemann (A).

**October 1947** – Hostel leader, Uffz Josef Hoellmann (B).

**January 1948** – same hostel leader.

**March 1948** – listed as a hostel with Walderslade Camp 117.

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|  | 1942 | 1943 | 7/45 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Mereworth Woods |  |  |  | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | \*\*\* | 90 | 58 | 191 | 140 | 145 | 135 |

**Tunbridge Wells (Ferndale Road).**

**1943** - Hostel for Italian pows

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|  | 1942 | 1943 | 9/45 | 12/45 | 3/46 | 6/46 | 9/46 | 2/47 | 5/47 | 9/47 | 12/47 | 1/48 |
| Tunbridge Wells |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |