



## **HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY AT BALCARRAS**

Today marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Headteacher, Mr Burke, gave a video assembly to each tutor group in the school. A copy of Mr Burke's talk is below.

### **Assembly for Holocaust Memorial Day January 27<sup>th</sup> 2025**

This Monday—the 27<sup>th</sup> of January—is the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz which was the most notorious of the Nazi death camps constructed during the Second World War. At Auschwitz over a million people, mainly Jewish people, were systematically executed in the very worst example of genocide ever known in human history. In total over 6 million Jewish people were murdered during the terrible period of history that we now call the Holocaust, although many Jewish people refer to it as the Shoah which means catastrophe.

In 1933 the Nazis took power in Germany and they quickly began to introduce policies which deliberately set out to persecute and intimidate Jewish people. These policies escalated and became violent from 1938 onwards. In 1939 the Nazis invaded Poland and in 1941 they invaded the Soviet Union. By 1942 the majority of Europe's 10 million Jewish population were under Nazi control. The invasions of Poland and the Soviet Union led to thousands of Jewish people being murdered but in 1942 the Nazis decided on a more systematic approach which they would call the 'Final Solution'.

They would build a number of 'death camps' located in Poland. Europe's Jewish population would be transported to these camps on trains and murdered in gas chambers. These killing centres would become the most shameful locations of the Twentieth Century—Chelmno, Sobibor, Majdanek, Belzec, Treblinka and Auschwitz. In these camps millions of people would be put to death for no other reason than that they were Jewish.

It is impossible to imagine the human suffering that happened in these camps and across Nazi occupied Europe. During the course of my life I have been to talks given by 4 holocaust survivors. I have always found it a humbling and moving experience. Of course, with the passage of time there are

few people left to bear witness to this suffering. One of the most famous survivors, the writer Elie Wiesel, who died 8 years ago wrote: "For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead *and* for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time."

As this generation passes it is important that each subsequent generation understands the horror of the Holocaust. Another famous survivor, Primo Levi wrote: "It happened therefore it can happen again." How do we ensure that it doesn't happen in our society? We have to build a society that is free from racism and discrimination. We must never judge people because of their race, ethnicity, religion or the colour of their skin.

Martin Niemoller was a Christian Priest living in Germany during the period of Nazi rule. He was initially a supporter of the Nazis, but as the regime became increasingly oppressive and violent he used his position to criticise the government. He was arrested and imprisoned inside Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. I have myself visited his cell and on the walls inside are written the words from Niemoller's famous poem:

First they came for the Communists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me  
And there was no one left  
To speak out for me

It is a powerful poem isn't it? Societies go wrong when good people turn away.

So far all of the quotes I have used have been from survivors. The final one I want to read is from a victim who did not survive: her name is Anne Frank. Along with her family she tried to hide from the Nazis in a secret annex in an apartment block in Amsterdam. Anne Frank kept a diary during this time. She died in Bergen Belsen concentration camp in 1944.

Here is an excerpt from her diary:

"That's the difficulty in these times: ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes rise within us, only to meet the horrible truth and be shattered. It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet, I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart."

Amidst the horror of the Holocaust Anne Frank was still optimistic about the fundamental quality of the human character.

Yes human beings are capable of doing terrible things. But it is also in our power to look after each other, to empathise with one another, and to support one another.

Let us all resolve to live in a society where everyone is free and where people are never judged by their race or ethnicity or religion and let alone killed for it. It is up to us. Anne Frank wrote: 'How wonderful it is that no one has to wait even a minute to start gradually changing the world'.

Dominic Burke 27<sup>th</sup> January 2025