

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY AT BALCARRAS

Today marks the 81st 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. Tutor groups in Year 9 to 13 also watched a short video—*It began with words*—produced by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust:

<https://hmd.org.uk/resource/educational-film/>



Holocaust Memorial Day 2026 talk by Mr Burke

This Tuesday 27th January is Holocaust Memorial Day. In the UK, as in many other parts of the world, this date is chosen because it is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz—27th January 1945. At Auschwitz over 1 million Jewish people were systematically put to death by the Nazis. In total over 6 million Jewish people were murdered during the Second World War.

Every year we pause to remember this terrible crime and to commit ourselves to live in a society where everyone can be who they want to be and no one is punished because of their race, religion or ethnicity. It is important that we remember what can happen when we single out individuals because of where they came from, or their religion, or the colour of their skin.

In his wonderful *I Have a Dream* speech, the civil rights leader Martin Luther King said that he dreamed of a society where his children “would not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”. The horrors of the Holocaust did not start in the gas chambers of Auschwitz or Treblinka, rather they began when people made the judgement that it was acceptable to treat people differently purely because of who they were.

The Holocaust survivor Eli Wisel wrote: “No human race is superior; no religious faith is inferior. All collective judgments are wrong. Only racists make them.” I have always argued that the only fair way

to make any judgement about an individual relates to the quality of their character. To make judgements because of religion, ethnicity, race, place of birth, or colour of skin is totally irrational. When people start down that road they are headed in a dark direction.

Life is full of opportunity and promise or at least it should be. It is impossible to imagine the scale of the suffering that happened during the Holocaust. To read first hand accounts of people who were trapped in this evil situation gives us a window into this terrible time in history. Here is an excerpt of a letter from Billich to his sons. It is held in the archive of the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

Today is Sept. 19, 1941. It's impossible to continue to live after these horrible experiences. All Jews have been taken away and there is no place to hide. Close friends are afraid to hide us until better times come. And they are right. I kiss you and hug you tight for the last time, and forever.

Imagine the pain of receiving such a letter. Imagine the pain of having to write it.

What happened to the Jewish people of Europe was a great crime in human history. It is now 81 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. The generation of people who survived are now in small numbers and soon there will be no one left to offer first-hand accounts. It is important that we continue to remember the terrible events of the 1940s. The Holocaust survivor Primo Levi said: "It happened therefore it can happen again".

We must all guard against the temptation to judge people based on where they were born or their race. After all who amongst us chose the circumstances of our own birth?

Rather let us resolve to live in a society where we respect each other's freedom, each other's view, each other's perspective and everyone's right to live and to prosper.

Dominic Burke

Short video explaining what Holocaust Memorial Day is

<https://hmd.org.uk/what-is-holocaust-memorial-day/>

It began with words. 10 minute film created by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

<https://hmd.org.uk/resource/educational-film/>