

## The Holocaust and Wales

# Jewish Refugees in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War

### Teachers' Notes

This resource looks at the stories of Jewish refugees who joined the British armed forces during the Second World War. Many Jewish soldiers who were formerly refugees served in Wales. Some were restricted to auxiliary units, while others trained as commandos and served in combat, including during the D-Day landings.

It contains:

- Background information on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces and where to find out more
- Short biographies of Herman Rothman, Herbert Patrick Anderson and Colin Anson
- Links to audio clips of oral history recordings of Herman Rothman, Herbert Patrick Anderson and Colin Anson
- Photograph of X Troop at Aberdyfi, 1943
- Transcripts of the audio clips

The resource assumes a basic understanding of the Holocaust. You may wish to cover the Holocaust Educational Trust's (HET) worksheet ['Defining the Holocaust'](#) before exploring these resources. See also the HET's ['General Principles for Teaching the Holocaust'](#).

### Learning aims:

- To gain knowledge about the role of Jewish refugees in the British armed forces during the Second World War, including their service in Wales, and to understand why they joined up
- To encourage discussion on historical events and their long-lasting effects on contemporary political geographies
- To develop critical thinking and a sense of empathy with those who have experienced suffering in the past
- To explore the importance of this story on Wales and the wider world and its connections to contemporary issues, including refugees, antisemitism, prejudice and racism

## Curriculum links

### The Four Purposes

Ambitious, capable learners who:

- are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts
- can communicate effectively in different forms and settings
- can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about
- undertake research and evaluate critically what they find

Enterprising, creative contributors who:

- connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products
- think creatively to reframe and solve problems
- express ideas and emotions through different media

Ethical, informed citizens who:

- find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views
- engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values
- understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights
- understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting
- are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past
- respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society

Healthy, confident individuals who:

- have secure values and are establishing their spiritual and ethical beliefs
- are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy
- have the confidence to participate in performance

### Statements of What Matters

Main Area of Learning and Experience: Humanities

Progression Step: 3 & 4

- Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future
- Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted and represented in different ways
- Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs

- Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action

#### Other Areas of Learning and Experience:

##### Health and Well-being

- How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being
- How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being

##### Languages, Literacy and Communication

- Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication

#### **Cross curricular skills and integral skills**

##### Literacy

- Developing oracy through discussion, role play, questioning and presentations, and adapting oracy skills for audience and purpose while listening to and debating different viewpoints
- Developing all styles of writing, e.g. describing, explaining, discussing, evaluating and creative writing, combined with the use of disciplinary-specific terminology and vocabulary
- Accessing and exploring a range of texts from a variety of places and times to analyse evidence, to think critically, to infer meaning, and to evaluate interpretations and viewpoints

##### Creativity and innovation

- Encouraging openness to different ideas and ways of thinking, enabling the expression of reasoned opinions about these differences

##### Critical thinking and problem-solving

- Developing the ability to think analytically and understand the past and present as well as to imagine possible futures
- Collecting, reflecting and critically evaluating the use of sources and evidence

##### Personal effectiveness

- Evaluating, justifying and expressing considered responses in a variety of ways

#### **Cross-cutting themes**

##### Relationship and sexuality education (RSE):

- The material offers learners opportunities to explore human rights, values, ethics, philosophies, and religious views relating to relationships

- It supports learners to engage critically with local, national, and global RSE issues in both the past and present, helping them to become ethical, informed citizens

Human rights education and diversity (e.g., discrimination, racism, antisemitism, refugees)

- Learners develop an understanding of the importance of democratic values and human rights and reflect on their civic responsibilities

### Cynefin – supporting learning in local contexts

The Holocaust is a large topic that can seem distant to learners in Wales. These resources allow learners to hear the stories of people who were directly affected by the Holocaust, and who lived in Wales. These are the stories of people who contributed to and were part of their local Welsh communities. They settled and had families here and their history is part of the story of Wales.

Learning about the Holocaust through local examples allows learners to discover their heritage and develop a sense of place and cynefin. It also removes the idea of ‘otherness’ – that this happened to other people in another place and time – and instead creates feelings of connection and empathy. These local examples can help learners to understand the link between Welsh history and global events like the Second World War and the Holocaust.

The full list of 20 resources about The Holocaust and Wales are:

- [Kindertransport 1: Jewish Life in Central Europe before the Second World War](#)
- [Kindertransport 2: The Journey to Britain](#)
- [Kindertransport 3: Arrival in Wales](#)
- [Kindertransport 4: Life in Wales](#)
- [Kristallnacht 1: Memories of Kristallnacht](#)
- [Kristallnacht 2: The last bar mitzvah](#)
- [Jewish Artists in Wales 1: Josef Herman](#)
- [Jewish Artists in Wales 2: Heinz Koppel](#)
- [Aero Zipp Fasteners at Treforest Trading Estate](#)
- [General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company at Treforest Trading Estate](#)
- [Internment of ‘enemy aliens’ 1](#)
- [Internment of ‘enemy aliens’ 2](#)
- [Jewish Refugees as Domestic Servants](#)
- [Jewish Refugee Doctors, Dentists and Nurses in Wales](#)
- [Jewish Refugees in the British Army during the Second World War](#)
- [Religious Life of Jewish Refugees in Wales](#)
- [The Welsh Language](#)
- [Liberation](#)



- [Identity](#)
- [Remembering the Holocaust](#)

## Ideas for activities

### Activity 1

The resource could be used to highlight the cosmopolitan nature of the British armed forces during the Second World War. Ask learners to identify nationalities that they believe fought in the British armed forces during the Second World War.

#### **Some notable answers:**

British (English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish); Indian; Polish; Australian; New Zealander; Canadian; South African; West Indian (Trinidadian; Bermudan, Jamaican, Barbadian; Guyanese); American; French; Belgian; Czechoslovak; Norwegian; Dutch; Irish; Kenyan; Ghanaian; Nigerian; Gambian; Sierra Leonean; Nepalese (Gurkhas).

Did anyone mention German, Austrian or Italian?

#### **Some useful questions:**

- Why were so many nationalities represented in the British armed forces during the war?
- What motivations might these soldiers have had for joining up?
- How important was the empire to Britain during this period? Why?

### Activity 2

The resource could be used to examine the motivations for refugees in joining the British armed forces. Ask learners to read the **background information** on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces and the **short biography** of Herman Rothman, and listen to [Audio Clip: Herman Rothman's motivation for joining the armed forces](#).

Why did Herman want to join the army? Do you think his reasons were legitimate?

#### **Other useful questions:**

- The Second World War has often been described as a 'just' war. What do you understand this to mean?
- Do you think German and Austrian Jews were justified in fighting for the Allies?
- Under what circumstances would you feel justified to take up arms?

### Activity 3

The resource could be used to interrogate the effect of service in the armed forces among both refugees and the wider Welsh population. Ask learners to read the **background information** on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces and the **short biography** of Herbert Patrick Anderson, and listen to [Audio Clip: Herbert Patrick Anderson's time with the Pioneer Corps in Carmarthenshire](#).

Would service in the Pioneer Corps have been disappointing for refugees? Why? How might the local population have reacted to the presence of Germans and Austrians in the British armed forces?

Ask learners to imagine that they are a local news reporter writing a story on Jewish refugees serving with the Pioneer Corps nearby. Write a short article (under 800 words) outlining their activities, motivations, and their interactions with the local population. It should include a title and subheading as well as text, and could include brief interviews with refugees or townspeople.

NB. This could be an opportunity to discuss newspaper censorship during wartime. See more: <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2014/09/12/chaos-and-censorship/>

#### Activity 4

The resource could be used to showcase the volatile nature of the European continent during the Second World War and its aftermath. Ask learners to read the **background information** on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces and look at the **Map of Europe, early 1942**. Do they recognise the countries/territories shown on the map? Can they name them? Do the countries still exist today? Why/why not?

Ask them to assign each of these labels to the appropriate colour shown on the map:

- Nazi Germany/German Reich (dark blue)<sup>1</sup>
- Areas under German occupation (dark grey)<sup>2</sup>
- German allies (light blue)<sup>3</sup>
- Soviet Union (red)
- Britain (pink)
- British-held areas (orange)<sup>4</sup>
- Neutral countries (green)<sup>5</sup>

Are there any labels that learners find surprising?

Can they identify all the countries where members of X Troop served during the war?

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<sup>1</sup> The German Reich includes the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the General Government (Poland).

<sup>2</sup> Yugoslavia was broken up by the Germans and split between client states and an occupied zone in central Serbia. After the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Germans in June 1941, former Soviet territory was also partitioned into *Reichskommissariate* (quasi-colonial administrative entities).

<sup>3</sup> French colonies in North Africa remained under the control of Vichy France until after November 1942.

<sup>4</sup> The Faroe Islands were occupied by Britain in April 1940. Cyprus and Malta were both controlled by Britain during this period. Iceland remained neutral but was invaded by Britain in May 1940 and became a *de facto* ally.

<sup>5</sup> Ireland, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Andorra, Switzerland, Sweden, Liechtenstein and Vatican City all remained neutral during the war.

## Activity 5

Ask learners to read the **background information** on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces and the **short biography** of Colin Anson, look at the **photograph** of X Troop at Aberdyfi, and listen to [Audio Clip: Colin Anson on changing his name to join X Troop](#).

How might you feel if you were a refugee asked to join an elite unit in the armed forces? Would changing your name be an issue for you? Why? If you had to change your name, what name would you choose?

Ask learners to imagine that they are a refugee who has been chosen to serve as a member of X Troop. Ask them to write a diary detailing how they feel and what they have done. It should begin roughly from the period when they joined the armed services and continue through to the training regime at Aberdyfi. They can write it as one long entry or as several smaller entries. Encourage learners to be creative, and remind them of the secretive and important nature of the unit.