



‘Enemy Aliens’ and Internment Camps

INFORMATION SHEET AND ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNERS

1. ‘Enemy aliens’ and their internment

After the outbreak of war in September 1939, all Germans and Austrians in Britain were considered a threat to national security by the British Government; they became ‘enemy aliens’ and had to register with the police. Although most remained at liberty, in the summer of 1940, restrictions tightened and tens of thousands were interned in camps. The largest of these camps was the Hutchinson Internment Camp on the Isle of Man. Most of those interned were Jewish refugees, who escaped the Nazi persecution and found sanctuary in Britain. Living conditions in many of the camps were inadequate. There was a shortage of medical supplies and poor access to clean water and proper sewage disposal.

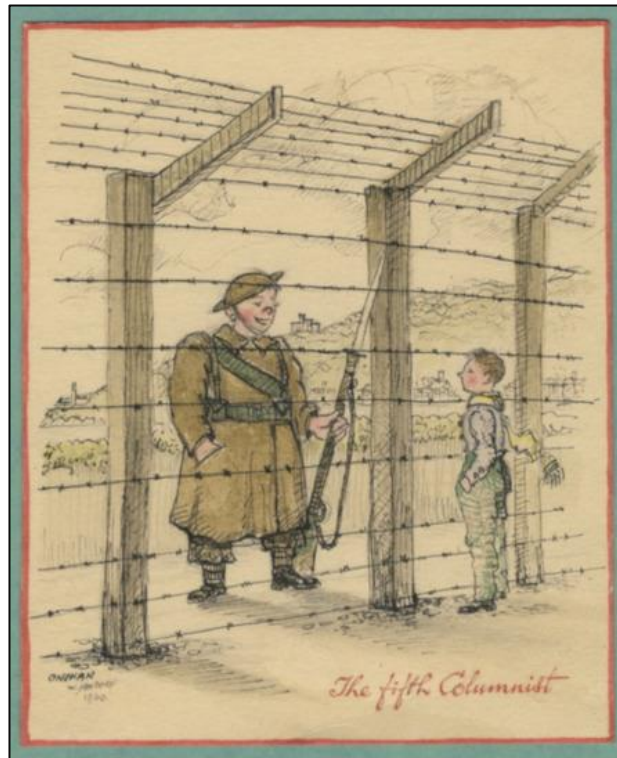
Wilhelm Jondorf’s Biography

Wilhelm Jondorf was a self-taught graphic designer, poet, composer, and singer, who owned his own graphic design and publishing company in Nuremberg, Germany. To escape Nazi persecution, he and his family emigrated to Britain in November 1938.

They settled down in Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan; in late 1938, Wilhelm set up a greeting cards company, Cardiff Cards Ltd, on the Treforest Industrial Estate.

Wilhelm was interned in May 1940, initially at the Prees Heath transit camp in Shropshire, where conditions were somewhat basic, with internees sleeping in tents on straw-filled mattresses. Wilhelm seems to have quickly become involved in the rich cultural life of the camp, which included galas and art exhibitions as well as a ‘university’ where interned academics gave lectures. At the end of summer 1940, when Prees Heath shut down, Wilhelm was transferred to the Onchan camp on the Isle of Man, which utilised disused guest houses. He remained active, producing both satirical and light-hearted coloured drawings of camp life.

Wilhelm was released from internment in late 1940 or early 1941 and returned to Wales.



The Fifth Columnist, Onchan, Isle of Man, 1940.

Drawing by Wilhelm Jondorf.

Ink and watercolour on cardboard. 15.2X12.5 cm.

Gift of Mrs Betty Jondorf, London.

Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem.

Paul Hornig's Biography

Paul Hornig was raised in Vienna, Austria. He was politically active from a young age, marching and demonstrating with Viennese activists.

After Hitler took over Austria in what is called the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria into the German Reich, in March 1938, many Austrian Jews tried to leave as they were terrified about what could happen to them living under a Nazi regime. in a Nazi country.

To escape being arrested by the Nazis, Paul got a transit visa to England and began studying at Cambridge University. Eventually, he was arrested as an 'enemy alien' and, in July 1940, shipped to Canada when the UK Government decided to extend its camp network to Commonwealth countries. He was imprisoned in the internment camp in Sherbrooke, east of Montreal, in an overcrowded block situated in two railway sheds with leaky ceilings, lack of toilets, and insufficient heating. After six months, he was shipped back to the UK and released.

Paul recalled:

“It was humiliating to have been rejected by the Austrians as a Jew and imprisoned by the English as an Austrian”.¹

He was later accepted by the British Army and trained at Aberdyfi, Gwynedd, with [X Troop](#).

Betty and Franz Hausner’s Biographies



[Franz and Betty Hausner on their wedding day in London in 1939.](#)

Image courtesy of Tony Hausner.

Franz Hausner and Betty Heimann were Jewish refugees from Vienna, Austria.

They had known each other a little in Vienna, but it was not until they met again in London that they fell in love and were married there in 1939. Soon after the wedding, Franz, Betty, and Franz’s brother, Walter, moved to a shared house in Cardiff. They set up a textile

¹ Leah Garrett, *X Troop: the Secret Jewish Commandos Who Helped Defeat the Nazis* (London: Vintage, 2022), pp. 33-34.

factory called Novel Textile Co. Ltd on Treforest Trading Estate, near Pontypridd. Back in Vienna, the two brothers had worked in the family business making lace and chenille.

After the war broke out, Franz and Betty were arrested and sent to two separate camps on the Isle of Man. Franz was interned in Mooragh Camp and Betty in Port Erin because men and women were made to live separately. We know about life in the camp and its many hardships through the regular letters exchanged by the couple. Betty revealed that she had been made to share a room with a Nazi woman and was only allowed to bathe every 14 days. Franz wrote about difficulties with their business, and he eventually decided to sell their textile factory.



[Letter written by Franz Hausner, interned at Mooragh Camp in Ramsey, in the Isle of Man, to his wife Betty, who was interned in Port Erin, Isle of Man, 27 November 1940.](#)

Images courtesy of Tony Hausner.

After their one-year internment ended, Franz and Betty decided to leave Cardiff and move to Liverpool before finally emigrating to America in 1950.

3. Activities

ACTIVITY 1

a) Read the following definition of internment:

“Internment is the imprisonment of people, commonly in large groups, without charges or intent to file charges. The term is especially used for the confinement of enemy citizens in wartime or of terrorism suspects.”²

b) Discuss as a class:

- What do you think about people being imprisoned without charges or intent to file charges?
- Who are enemy citizens?

ACTIVITY 2

a) Read the information about ‘enemy aliens’, Wilhelm Jondorf, Paul Hornig, and Betty and Franz Hausner, and listen to the [audio clip](#) from an oral history interview with Dorothy Fleming. In the clip, Dorothy describes the day her father, Erich Oppenheimer, was arrested and interned.

Oral History transcript:

He had found work in Hatton Garden. And you know how it was with the internment, if they found the people in, they took them. If not, they often didn't come again. That's why a lot of the refugees who had their work would spend their day in the park.

Now, my father was working in Hatton Garden and my mother said he came home one day at lunchtime and she said she went quite pale, and said, ‘What are you doing here?’ And he said, ‘I've just come for some tools.’ And that minute the bell rang and they came and said ‘Mr Oppenheimer, I'm afraid you have to come with us’.

And he was taken to the Isle of Man.

And just now when my mother died, I discovered all his letters from the Isle of Man. I didn't know they existed. He must have written more or less every other day, in German.

And he doesn't complain but he must have suffered terribly because to have escaped from the Nazis and then to be locked up and away from my mother and she in the Blitz, it must have been absolutely dreadful. I know they made some sort of a life for themselves and they played music and they had lectures and all sorts of things. But it must have been dreadful for him.

b) Consider and discuss in pairs or small groups:

- Why did the British Government intern the Jewish refugees?

² Wikipedia, *Internment* (2022) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment>> [accessed 09 July 2024]



- What did Wilhelm Jondorf, Paul Hornig, Betty and Franz Hausner, and Erich Oppenheimer experience?
- How did the Jewish refugees who had managed to escape the Nazi persecution, found refuge in Britain, and were then interned by the British Government feel?
- What impact do you think it would have on someone who was forced to leave their job and/or family for a second time?

c) Communicate the main discussion points to the whole class.

ACTIVITY 3

a) Write a letter to a newspaper from the point of view of a campaigner in 1940 who is opposed to the internment of Jewish refugees.

b) Share your letter with the whole class for discussion and feedback.