

From Silence to the Heart of British Values: The Development of  
Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain

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## Abstract

This thesis traces the development of Britain's Holocaust consciousness since the 1970s in order to understand the unfolding controversy surrounding the development of a new Holocaust memorial in the Victoria Tower Gardens, London. A comparison will be drawn with developments in Australia to reveal the unique features of the British historical context that have shaped the politics of Holocaust memory in Britain. This politicisation has resulted in the framing of Holocaust commemoration by the Conservative government in an uncritical language of 'British values' so as to distance British identity from a European identity.

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## Introduction

This thesis investigates the origins of the unfolding controversy surrounding the development of a British national Holocaust memorial in the Victoria Tower Gardens, London. On 27 January 2015 British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a national Holocaust memorial would be built in central London.<sup>1</sup> This had been one of the four recommendations to come out of the Holocaust Commission established by Cameron a year earlier to find ways the United Kingdom could do more to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and ensure future generations would have access to resources to learn the ‘lessons’ of the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the location of the memorial and its intended design was revealed in 2016 that the controversy began. On 27 January 2016 Cameron announced that the location of the memorial and learning centre would be the Victoria Tower Gardens in London.<sup>3</sup> Several months later the winning design for the memorial was revealed.<sup>4</sup> Some in the public have criticised the decision to have a Holocaust memorial in such a prominent location and with such a large-scale design, while

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<sup>1</sup> “Press release: Prime Minister pledges prominent Holocaust Memorial for Britain”, UK Government, 27 January 2015. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-prominent-holocaust-memorial-for-britain>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “Speech: David Cameron's Holocaust Commission speech”, UK Government, 27 January 2014. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/david-camersons-holocaust-commission-speech>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

<sup>3</sup> “Press Release: PM, Holocaust Memorial Will Stand Beside Parliament as Permanent Statement of our British Values.”, UK Government, 27 January 2016. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-holocaust-memorial-will-stand-beside-parliament-as-permanent-statement-of-our-british-values>>. Accessed 1 March 2021.

<sup>4</sup> “Press release: Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects win UK Holocaust Memorial International Design Competition”, UK Government, 24 October 2017. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architexts-win-uk-holocaust-memorial-international-design-competition>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

others have pointed to the destruction and disruption the memorial's design would cause to the well-used park. What has also caused concern is the lengths to which the British government has gone to ensure that the memorial is built in this location. On 5 November 2019 the British government overruled the Westminster Council's decision to reject the memorial's planning permission and, after a planning inquiry on 6 October 2020, mandated that the memorial be built in the Victoria Tower Gardens.<sup>5</sup>

This study argues that this ongoing controversy is emblematic of a conflict between national agendas and local interests that has acted as a catalyst for the politicisation of Holocaust commemorations in Britain. The fraught development of the new memorial has raised several questions about British Holocaust consciousness: To begin, why is the British government building a national Holocaust memorial in the first place? Even though it may seem obvious to Holocaust survivors and the Jewish community that Britain should have one, there are many episodes in Britain's own fraught history that could serve as a basis for memorialisation and human rights pedagogy. Historical memory of the slave trade, for example, has routinely been ignored in favour of Holocaust memory. Secondly, why is the memorial being purposely located in the Victoria Tower Gardens? For the memorial to be placed in such an iconic and controversial location is highly significant. Thirdly, why is the

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<sup>5</sup> Ella Jessel, "Holocaust Memorial protestors furious over 'undemocratic power grab'", *The Architects Journal*, 6 November 2019. <<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/holocaust-memorial-protestors-furious-over-undemocratic-power-grab>>. Accessed 20 July 2021: "Holocaust Memorial inquiry information", City of Westminster, 27 January 2021. <<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/planning-building-and-environmental-regulations/find-appeal-or-comment-planning-application/holocaust-memorial-inquiry-information/public-inquiry-and-application-details>>. Accessed 30 June 2021.

proposed Holocaust memorial framed using patriotic rhetoric? Conservative politicians have repeatedly proclaimed that the new memorial will embody 'British values'. Elsewhere, the Holocaust has been typically framed as a pan-European event, the foundation for 'cosmopolitan' European values, but the messaging around this memorial is strikingly nationalistic.<sup>6</sup> Finally, how did Britain arrive at this official discourse of Holocaust consciousness, and what does it say about Britain that prominent elites are now conceptualising Holocaust memory in this way?

In order to answer these questions, and understand the deeper origins of the current controversy, this thesis will look back at the history of Holocaust memory in Britain since the 1970s. The focus of this thesis will be on the four key developments in Britain's official Holocaust memory: the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, Holocaust Memorial Day, and the Victoria Tower Gardens Memorial. I will use a comparative approach to highlight the key elements that have defined Britain's evolving approach to Holocaust commemorations. While the primary locus of this investigation is the United Kingdom, I will contrast Holocaust memorialisation in Britain with parallel developments in Australia, including the Jewish Holocaust Centre and the Sydney Jewish Museum. Using this method of 'asymmetric' comparison, the aim is to re-contextualise the Victoria Tower Gardens controversy while, in the process, examining the reasons for the divergence in the development of Holocaust consciousness in the two nations. The bulk of the primary research will be in the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Levy, and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory" *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 100.

third chapter, while the first two chapters focusing on building upon the existing scholarship by introducing a comparative approach to these established historical debates. The comparison to Australia will be made in the first and second chapters to offer an alternative perspective on how Britain's Holocaust commemorations could have developed differently and argue that it was because of their particular national contexts that it did not. Thus, I will be building upon the work of historians on Britain's Holocaust consciousness by using this comparative approach to highlight issues that have so far gone unexplored.

The findings of this comparative analysis highlight the limitations of transnational approaches to Holocaust memory. I argue that the development of Holocaust memorialisation in Britain has had more to do with national influences than transnational ones. This is not to say that there are not strong transnational influences at play in Holocaust memorialisation but that a transnational approach risks undervaluing the importance of national context.<sup>7</sup> By examining the similarities and differences between Britain and Australia's national contexts, it becomes clear that some elements of Holocaust memorialisation do not transcend national boundaries. Although international trends and developments have certainly shaped the development of British Holocaust consciousness, ultimately national factors and influences have been paramount in determining Britain's approach to commemorating Holocaust memory.

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<sup>7</sup> Assmann, Aleida. "Transnational Memories." *European Review* 22, no. 4 (2014): 546.



The second approach this thesis takes is to examine the place of silence in historical memory. Every act of remembrance, after all, is also equally an act of forgetting.<sup>8</sup> What goes unsaid and unremembered is in many ways just as significant as what is said and what is remembered.<sup>9</sup> Memorials and museums act as physical manifestations of official national memory.<sup>10</sup> These sites of public memory showcase which memories have been prioritised as well as which have been hidden or ignored.<sup>11</sup> The choices made behind the scenes are all the more significant when considering what choices they could have made but decided not to, revealing how certain memories are valued for their utility.<sup>12</sup> I argue here that the selection of memories to be enshrined in official Holocaust consciousness has been conditioned by nationalist imperatives, as British institutions have brought to the fore aspects of Holocaust memory that hide their flaws while omitting others that expose them. In this manner, I reframe the findings of scholars of British Holocaust consciousness by bringing them into conversation with debates around memory in order to highlight the absences in Britain's national memory.

British historians have typically approached Britain's Holocaust consciousness from a national perspective. There have been several surveys conducted on the history of

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandre Dessingué, and Jay Winter, 'Introduction: Remembering, forgetting and silence', in *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, ed. Alexandre Dessingué and Jay Winter (London: Routledge, 2016), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Chana Teeger, "Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting" *Social Forces* 88, no. 3 (2010): 1103.

<sup>10</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Winter, 'Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 61-62.

<sup>12</sup> Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 'Introduction Mapping Memory', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 2-3.

Holocaust consciousness in Britain which have examined the British context in isolation. The most prominent of which have been Andy Pearce's book *The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, David Tollerton's book *Holocaust Memory and Britain's Religious-Secular Landscape*, and the work of several historians in the extensive edited volume *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*.<sup>13</sup> Within these accounts the focus has largely been on the political, cultural, and religious influences that have shaped Britain's Holocaust consciousness. These historians, however, have only provided a partial perspective on Britain's Holocaust consciousness because they have overlooked the value of a comparative approach. Thus, this thesis will draw upon the work of these scholars but diverges from them by bringing the British and Australian perspectives together.

In doing so, this thesis brings to light several key factors of Britain's Holocaust consciousness which have so far been overlooked by these British historians who have focused solely on a national perspective. The importance of the involvement of Holocaust survivors in Holocaust commemorations has been a crucial element of Australia's Holocaust consciousness but its influence on British Holocaust consciousness has been left unexplored by British scholars. As a result, considerations of the history of Britain's Jewish community and their participation in Holocaust commemorations are absent from these accounts. Furthermore, by addressing the alternative approaches to Holocaust commemoration that have

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<sup>13</sup> Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); David Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory and Britain's Religious-Secular Landscape: Politics, Sacrality, and Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Tom Lawson, and Andy Pearce ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

occurred in Australia, this thesis is able to highlight more clearly the characteristics of the British approach and bring attention to divergences which would have otherwise been missed. So far there has been a paucity of scholarship on the proposed Holocaust memorial in the Victoria Tower Gardens, with the exception of David Tollerton. This thesis therefore delves into this contemporary controversy in order to bring a new perspective on the current state of Britain's Holocaust consciousness. The controversy is significant because it has revealed a tension between the local and national governments whereby the Conservative government's national agendas have overridden the local government's concerns and authority. As the first state sponsored Holocaust memorial in Britain, the Victoria Tower Gardens Memorial has been embedded with the political aspirations of the current national government that go beyond Holocaust remembrance.

The first chapter of this thesis establishes the context for the state of Britain's post war Holocaust consciousness and charts the beginning of the shift in British Holocaust memory with the development of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial. Although the memorial was rightfully viewed as a success by the British Jewish community, its development was very much shaped by the elite of British society and reflected the uneasy position of the Jewish community in post war British society. The negotiations and compromises made over the memorial reflected larger negotiations and compromises the British Jewish elite had made to coexist in British society. In contrast, the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne was founded by Holocaust survivors and the local Jewish community without any involvement of the Australian government. The museum was unburdened by Britain's complex

history with anti-Semitism and as a result the survivors were able to focus on providing a meaningful education to the Australian public about the Holocaust. The development of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial also offers a counterpoint to the current memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens because of its fundamental differences. The location, design, and messaging of the latter memorial in many ways has nothing to do with the Jewish community. Although they were consulted by the government's initial Holocaust commission, the decisions over the size, design, and location of the memorial were entirely out of their hands. This suggests that Holocaust memory has become a political tool of the British state to burnish Britain's national image and further a nationalist agenda, one that has omitted discussions of British indifference to Jewish suffering and conflated human rights with British values.

The second chapter traces the roots of this approach to the early 2000s, which coincided with the opening of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition and the launching of Holocaust Memorial Day. Both of these developments incorporated Holocaust memory into British war memory in order to make the Holocaust relevant for a British audience and make British Holocaust consciousness a vehicle for fostering a positive national identity. The lack of involvement from Holocaust survivors in the creation of the Holocaust Exhibition and the educational rather than commemorative commitment of the museum resulted in a representation of the Holocaust that prioritised a perpetrator led narrative and framed Britain as the antithesis of Nazi Germany. The Sydney Jewish Museum, on the other hand, as a result of being funded by Holocaust survivors and the Jewish community, had taken

an opposite approach to Holocaust representation and foregrounded a survivor led narrative that aimed to commemorate as well as educate. The Imperial War Museum's approach to Holocaust representation became embedded into Britain's public consciousness through the initiation of Holocaust Memorial Day which reinforced an uncritical British national identity by focusing on Britain's role as 'war heroes' in the Second World War rather than their own history with slavery or colonial violence.

The third and final chapter looks at the Victoria Tower Garden memorial in light of this history, bringing to the fore historical continuities and discontinuities with Britain's past approach to Holocaust commemorations. While much of the rhetoric around the memorial is in line with the approach established by the Imperial War Museum and Holocaust Memorial Day, there is a new emphasis on 'British values', reinforced by British politicians and the choice of location. This emphasis on 'British values' reflects a shift in British Conservative political discourse away from a shared European identity to an exclusively British one. Rather than integrating Holocaust memory with Britain's own history of colonialism or slavery, the British Conservative government has instead attempted to 'Anglicise' the Holocaust for their own national agendas. Therefore, demonstrating the evolving politicisation of Holocaust memory by the British government and elites as a means of legitimising the state.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ketil Knutsen, 'Strategic silence: Political persuasion between the remembered and the forgotten', in *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, ed. Alexandre Dessingué and Jay Winter (London: Routledge, 2016), 135.

## Chapter One

### Breaking the Silence: The Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial

This chapter focuses on the development of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial by the Board of Deputies in 1983 as the first significant development in Britain's official Holocaust consciousness. Before this point in Britain, like the rest of Europe, there had not been any substantial engagement with Holocaust memory. While countries outside of Europe such as Israel and the United States saw a rapid development in Holocaust consciousness during the 1970s, Britain was markedly slower to begin this process. A comparison will be drawn with the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, Australia established in 1984 in order to demonstrate that the relationship of the British Jewry to the state, the history of anti-Semitism in the Britain and the role of Holocaust survivors had a major impact on how the Hyde Holocaust Park memorial evolved. The emergence of Holocaust consciousness in both countries was driven by the work of their respective Jewish communities and therefore reflected the relative position of these communities in society. In contrast to Britain, Australian Holocaust museums, beginning with the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre in 1984, were all funded and established by Holocaust survivors without the involvement of the state.<sup>15</sup> This was in part because the Australian Jewish community did not have the same status as the British Jewish elite. As a

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<sup>15</sup> Avril Alba, "Displaying the Sacred: Australian Holocaust Memorials in Public Life", *Holocaust Studies* 13, no 2-3 (2007): 152.

result, the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre was able to have a strong focus on educating the Australian public about the Holocaust whereas the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial became ensnared in negotiations between Jewish elites and the British state over the place of Jewish identity in British public spaces.

It is widely agreed that Britain from 1945 to the late 1970s was marked by a substantial lack of engagement with Holocaust memory from the non-Jewish community.<sup>16</sup> While commemorative activity for the Holocaust had occurred in Britain during this time, it was limited to events held by local Jewish communities.<sup>17</sup> These events were initially very fragmented with different Jewish organisations holding their own Holocaust commemorations, such as the annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising held by Polish Jews, until the late 1950s when calls from the wider Jewish community in Britain to transition to a centralised annual memorial evening were realised.<sup>18</sup> Yet the work that had been done within those Jewish communities to create a Holocaust memory was still not completely unified and had not impacted on the public consciousness of the non-Jewish population. However, Britain was not unique for following what has been called the 'silence model' in the immediate post war period.<sup>19</sup> This model, while challenged and complicated in some recent scholarship, has become the mainstream narrative in the historiography of Holocaust consciousness. It posits that both within and outside of

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<sup>16</sup> Andy Pearce, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain, 1979-2001." *Holocaust Studies* 14, no. 2 (2008): 73.

<sup>17</sup> Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 89.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Berman, "Holocaust Commemorations in London and Anglo-Jewish (Dis-)Unity", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2004): 53.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Lawson and James Jordan, "Introduction", in *The Memory of the Holocaust in Australia*, ed. Tom Lawson and James Jordan (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 5.

Europe there was a suppression of Holocaust memory in the aftermath of the war.<sup>20</sup> Jay Winter has conceptualised this as an example of 'liturgical silence', which he has argued are 'essential parts of mourning practices in many religious traditions', especially in response war and violence.<sup>21</sup> This 'silence' spanned from countries within Europe where the Holocaust had taken place such as Germany and Poland, to those that had been under Nazi occupation such as Belgium and the Ukraine, to countries outside of Europe like the United States where, similarly to Britain, the war had been conceptualised as a fight against a 'universal evil' rather than a racially motivated regime.<sup>22</sup> While this 'silence model' has been criticised by historians for its lack of nuance, particularly as regards the question of whether Jews themselves spoke of the Nazi genocide after the Second World War, for the purpose of this chapter Britain's lack of significant development of a national Holocaust consciousness in the post-war years can be seen as a part of a wider international trend.

Where Britain differs from countries outside of Europe is the pace and method with which they began to address the Holocaust in public consciousness. The first real shift in this trend for Britain was in 1979, when, as a result of cultural and political developments during 1970s, the process of creating the first national Holocaust memorial began. At this point Britain, like other countries in Europe such as Germany and Poland, was deemed to be 'lagging' behind the countries outside of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jay Winter, 'Thinking about Silence', in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Lawson and Jordan, "Introduction", 5.



Europe, such as Israel and the United States, in developing a collective consciousness about the Holocaust.<sup>23</sup> For example, in 1957 Yad Vashem, a national memorial, museum and research centre for the Holocaust, had opened to the public in Israel. By 1979 the President's Commission on the Holocaust had been launched in the United States with the committed to build its own national Holocaust memorial museum. Moreover, the 1970s witnessed a period of rapid growth for Holocaust scholarship.<sup>24</sup>

Even so, Britain was not part of this growth of public Holocaust consciousness. The absence of Holocaust memory in British public life was most reflected in the absence of a national Holocaust memorial, Holocaust educational policies, or any representations of the Holocaust in British museums. A valuable comparison that has yet to be made is between the development of Britain's first Holocaust memorial in 1983 and the development of Australia's first Holocaust museum in 1984. In many ways the two countries were at a similar stage of Holocaust consciousness in the early 1980s. Before the opening of the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne there had been no official Holocaust memorials, museums, or education initiatives in Australia either. However, the two countries diverged significantly in how their first attempts at Holocaust remembrance developed and the eventual shape they took. These variances were the result of their different histories with their Jewish populations, especially with regard to their relationship to the state and their acceptance in society. In the early years of Holocaust consciousness in both Britain

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<sup>23</sup> Adam Sutcliffe, "The politics of Holocaust memory" in *History, Memory and Public Life: The Past in the Present*, ed. Anna Maerker, Simon Sleight, and Adam Sutcliffe (London: Routledge, 2018), 278.

<sup>24</sup> Pearce, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain", 72.

and Australia their development relied heavily on the work of the Jewish communities within them. In the remainder of this chapter, rather than engage in an in-depth analysis of Australian Holocaust commemorations, I will examine the parallel developments of the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre and the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial in order to highlight points of contrast between Britain and Australia's approach to Holocaust remembrance.

Britain's Holocaust consciousness emerged in earnest in late 1970s when the process of establishing Britain's first official Holocaust Memorial began. There had been signs during the 1970s of increasing dissatisfaction from parts of the Jewish community with the lack of Holocaust consciousness in Britain, especially with the absence of an official memorial and educational initiatives. This dissatisfaction was not only directed at the British government, but also at organisations within the Jewish community itself. A letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1978 lamented 'the remarkable lack of interest by all but a handful of organisations' within the Jewish community in commemorating the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup> Although there had been increased interest from the general public in the Holocaust during this period, in the form of 'articles, books and television programmes', official institutions in Britain had not made any significant attempts to address the Holocaust and attendance at Holocaust commemorations held by Jewish organisations was lacking.<sup>26</sup> The Board of Deputies

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Keller, "Remembering the Six Million", Letter to the Editor. *The Jewish Chronicle*. 26 May 1978, 18. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.301290?highlight=Remembering+the+Six+Million>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Roger V. Pavey, "Remembering the Six Million", Letter to the Editor. *The Jewish Chronicle*. 26 May 1978, 18. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.301290?highlight=Remembering+the+Six+Million>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

of British Jews, although they were meant to be the central representative body of the Anglo-Jewish community, had limited their involvement in Holocaust commemorations to providing minimal financial support.<sup>27</sup> Holocaust remembrance was not deemed to be a top priority.

This changed when prominent Israeli Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer on the 3rd of July 1979 at a meeting in Geneva of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, criticised that 'In Britain, nothing at all has been done, and there exists it appears, an opposition on the part of the older generation in the Jewish community to introducing educational programmes specifically on the Holocaust'.<sup>28</sup> Bauer's comments reflected a widespread sentiment within the British Jewish community and sparked a strong reaction from Greville Janner, the President of the Board of Deputies. Janner had been the first, and only, Board of Deputies President to dedicate substantial time and effort to establishing a British Holocaust memorial.<sup>29</sup> He had written to Bauer on the 24th of July telling him that he was shocked at Bauer's comments, arguing that the Board of Deputies' Yad Vashem Committee had already made a lot of progress and that there were plans in the near future for 'a national Holocaust Memorial in the centre of London'.<sup>30</sup> However, Bauer's comments clearly had an impact as Janner had only begun the process of developing a national Holocaust memorial a few weeks after the meeting of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. On the 16th of July Janner had written to the

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<sup>27</sup> Berman, "Holocaust Commemorations in London", 55.

<sup>28</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 452.

<sup>29</sup> Berman, "Holocaust Commemorations in London", 58.

<sup>30</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 452.

Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, to ask about the possibility of locating a Holocaust memorial in the Jewel House Gardens opposite Westminster Palace and the Victoria Tower Gardens.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to revealing deep frustrations within the Jewish community and spurring Janner into action, Bauer's comments in 1979 highlighted the tensions that existed within the Jewish community over how to address the Holocaust in public. The Jewish community in Britain has never been a monolithic entity.<sup>32</sup> Differences in class, age, gender, and religious influences have caused there to be a range of diverging opinions within the community. These differences emerged starkly in discussions about Holocaust memory. The two divisions that created the most tension within the Jewish community were between the older and younger generations, and between the upper classes and non-elites. As Bauer implied in his criticism, there appeared to be resistance from some of the older generations on 'focusing' too much on the Holocaust, whether through education programs or public memorials. While others felt that they were 'in danger of trying to forget the Holocaust' because there was not 'any commemoration of this shattering event in our history...'.<sup>33</sup> The Board of Deputies' campaign for a Holocaust memorial was 'structured by the particular historical relationship between the Board of Deputies – as the Anglo-Jewish 'elite' – and the British State. This revolves around the negotiation between conceptions of 'Jewishness' and 'Britishness' within the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> David Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory and Britain's Religious-Secular Landscape: Politics, Sacrality, and Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 33.

<sup>33</sup> Pavey, "Remembering the Six Million", 18.

assimilationist framework of British society'.<sup>34</sup> It is thus important not only to understand the dynamics between the different elements of the Jewish community but also how these dynamics intersected with the broader Jewish community's relationship with British society.

A major concern which underpinned many of the reactions from the Jewish community to Holocaust commemorations at this time was a fear of provoking anti-Semitism. There had been an unspoken social contract between the Jewish and non-Jewish community whereby the Jewish population were allowed to exist within Britain so long as they 'kept their heads down' and did not draw attention to being Jewish.<sup>35</sup> Much of this fear can be attributed not only to the Holocaust, which acted as the ultimate example of the destructive potential of anti-Semitism, but also Britain's own history with anti-Semitism, particularly in the interwar years. As a result of Jewish 'residential and economic mobility' in the 1900s there had been more interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish communities during the interwar years in Britain than even before.<sup>36</sup> The transition of British Jews into the middle-class led to the disruption of the 'once homogeneous ethnic character' of traditional middle-class social spaces.<sup>37</sup> In response to the arrival of this middle-class Jewish presence there was a resurgence of anti-Semitism within British society which was hostile towards their 'Jewish difference'.

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<sup>34</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 451.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 198.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 198-199.

While this form of anti-Semitism was not new, Todd Endelman argues that 'its impact in the interwar period on how Jews thought and felt about themselves was more intense than before'.<sup>38</sup> Whereas the previous generation of Jewish immigrants had kept to their own communities, the 'upwardly mobile second-generation' ventured out of these communities and were confronted persistently by 'corrosive reminders of gentile constructions of their difference'.<sup>39</sup> Even the Jewish elite, who had close affiliations with the English Establishment and whose ancestors in Britain often stretched back over a century, experienced the effect of this anti-Semitism. Although for them 'the toll was emotional, rather than physical or material, a blow to their self-esteem and self-image'.<sup>40</sup> The emphasis on how their 'Jewishness' differed to traditional concepts of 'Britishness' caused the Jewish elite to question their position in British society. It reinforced the idea that a Jewish identity and British identity were incompatible and only coexisted very uneasily. Even though a truly virulent expression of anti-Semitism never actualised in Britain during this period, with the brief exception of the British Union of Fascists who failed to gain widespread support, the anti-Semitism that was present in the interwar years deeply strained the relationship between the Jewish community and British society whereby displays of Jewish identity were hidden for fear of provoking anti-Semitic violence. Thus, the older generations in the Jewish community would have naturally been more apprehensive about public remembrance of the Holocaust than the younger generations because they had lived through this period and experienced first-hand the fragility of Jewish coexistence in British society. Furthermore, many members of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 200-201.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 204.

the Board of Deputies would have been part of this Jewish elite who had previously thought their wealth and longstanding place in British society would protect them from anti-Semitism and had a vested interest in maintaining their status. The apprehension from the Jewish community regarding public commemorations of the Holocaust was therefore the result of the perceived hostility they had received from the non-Jewish community, with the older and more elite members being particularly concerned due to their own experiences with interwar anti-Semitism.

The situation for the Jewish community in Australia was quite different. While there certainly was anti-Semitism in Australia, the Jewish community there was not burdened with the history of anti-Semitism that had occurred in Britain. Before the Second World War the 'Australian Jewry was a small, well integrated and Anglicized community'.<sup>41</sup> In fact, according to Suzanne Rutland, the Jewish community had to a large degree become assimilated into Australian society due to their treatment as 'social equals and the virtual absence of anti-Semitism'.<sup>42</sup> During the interwar years, especially the 1920s, while Britain witnessed a resurgence of anti-Semitism, in Australia the rates of intermarriage between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities rose so high that it threatened to disintegrate the Jewish community.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Australian Jewry lacked a strong sense of Jewish identity. On the whole, they valued being 'Australian' more highly than being 'Jewish'.<sup>44</sup> This changed dramatically with the beginning of the Second World War and the influx of

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<sup>41</sup> Suzanne D. Rutland, "A Changing Community - the Impact of the Refugees on Australian Jewry: New South Wales - a Case Study." *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 31, no. 1 (1985): 90.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

Jewish refugees from Europe. There were approximately 35,000 to 40,000 Jewish refugees who migrated to Australia between 1933 and 1963 who were either fleeing Nazi persecution or were Holocaust survivors.<sup>45</sup> This growth more than doubled the size of the Australian Jewish community from approximately 23,553 in 1933 to 48,436 in 1954.<sup>46</sup> It also meant that, after of Israel, Australia had the largest amount of Holocaust survivors per population in the world.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, in the post war period, the majority of the Jewish community in Australia did not have the same relationship to the state that the British Jewry did. More than half their population were first-generation immigrants to Australia and there were no long-established links to the Australian Establishment. Furthermore, the presence of so many Holocaust survivors meant that there was a greater awareness of the Holocaust among Australian Jews than most other parts of the world.<sup>48</sup> However, this does not explain *why* Australia developed a Holocaust consciousness because the mere presence of Holocaust survivors was not enough. In the post war period Australia still largely conformed to the 'silence model' like other countries within and outside of Europe. It was not until public interest in the Holocaust rose in the 1970s, due in part to the Eichmann trial in the late 1960s and the broadcast of the American television series *The Holocaust* which was among Australia's top rated television series in 1978, that Holocaust commemoration and education in Australia began.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Judith Berman, "Australian Representations of the Holocaust: Jewish Holocaust Museums in Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney, 1984-1996", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13, no 2 (1999): 202.

<sup>46</sup> Suzanne D Rutland, "Australian Responses to Jewish Refugee Migration before and after World War II." *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 31, no. 1 (1985): 45.

<sup>47</sup> Deborah Staines, "Aftermath: Holocaust Survivors in Australia. An Introduction", *Holocaust Studies* 16, no 3. (2010): 2.

<sup>48</sup> Judith Berman, "Holocaust Museums in Australia: The Impact of Holocaust Denial and the Role of the Survivors", *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 10, no 1. (2001): 69.

<sup>49</sup> Lawson and Jordan, "Introduction", 7.



Rather the sheer amount of Holocaust survivors in Australia explains why Australian Holocaust remembrance developed in the *way* that it did and, more importantly, why Britain did not follow a similar path.

Britain's first Holocaust memorial in Hyde Park was built through a series of negotiations between The Board of Deputies, a group of Jewish elites, and the British government. The central role of the Board of Deputies in these negotiations raised issues around the relationship between class and the acceptance of Jews in British society. The Board of Deputies was originally founded in 1760 to settle disputes between the leading London synagogues.<sup>50</sup> However, over the years the Board of Deputies had come to play a significant advisory role to the British government. In fact, the Board of Deputies positioned itself as 'the only official intermediary between the British Jewish community and the state'.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the campaign for the memorial was a top-down initiative and very much shaped by the particular position of the Jewish elite in British society at the time. There was not any input from non-elites within the Jewish, or non-Jewish, community and the emphasis on assimilating into British society was disseminated down from the Jewish elite.<sup>52</sup> It was only due to their advanced but tenuous position within British society that the campaign for the memorial was taken seriously at all. Yet the memorial received no funding from the government and instead had to be privately funded by Board of Deputies. It was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* on the 23rd of October 1979 that in

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<sup>50</sup> Aubrey Newman, "The Board of Deputies of British Jews, 1760 to the present", *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 25, no 1 (November 2005): 81.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>52</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 452.

response to members of the Board of Deputies questioning whether the government would provide any financial support for the memorial, Conservative politician Michael Heseltine said, 'No. If a memorial like this cannot attract enough private support it is not worth erecting in the first place'.<sup>53</sup> Although this comment received 'applause', the obvious counter argument was that if it had been worth erecting then the government should have financially supported it, not left it to private donors. Holocaust commemoration was clearly deemed to be the responsibility of the Jewish community, not the responsibility of the state.

This was similar to the situation in Australia with the development of their first Holocaust museum. Like Britain, Australian Holocaust commemoration was thought to be the responsibility of the Jewish community to organise and there was little initiative from the state to assist them. In fact, this was more so the case in Australia because the Australian government was not involved in the creation of the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne at all. Instead, Holocaust survivors themselves were the driving force behind the creation of an Australian Holocaust memory from the 1970s.<sup>54</sup> Unlike in Britain, where the campaign for the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial was led by the British Board of Deputies, the Jewish leadership in Australia provided little support to the Holocaust survivors' plans to establish the Jewish Holocaust Centre, or any of the subsequent Holocaust museums in Perth in 1990 and Sydney in 1992.<sup>55</sup> In stark contrast to the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, the Jewish Holocaust Museum was very much a local initiative, funded and

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<sup>53</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23 October 1979, quoted in Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 454.

<sup>54</sup> Berman, "Australian Representations of the Holocaust", 202.

<sup>55</sup> Berman, "Holocaust Museums in Australia", 69.

supported by two Jewish organizations, the Federation of Polish Jews and the Kadimah, and a group of Holocaust survivors.<sup>56</sup> Many of founders of the museum were themselves Holocaust survivors living in Melbourne such as Bono Wiener and Abram Goldberg who had begun collecting artifacts on the Holocaust during their time in the Łódź Ghetto.<sup>57</sup> Some of these artifacts would later come to be used in the museum itself.<sup>58</sup>

The central involvement of these Australian Holocaust survivors, who lived in the local community, lent a very personal and authentic quality to the museum, which was lacking in Britain at the time. It was grounded by the embedding of their individual stories and personal belongings into the core of the museum's displays. Their involvement resolved a major concern that arises behind all forms of remembrance, that is, who has the 'right' to speak about the past, especially a violent one.<sup>59</sup> Holocaust survivors in this case can uniquely 'claim the authority of direct experience required' to speak about the Holocaust.<sup>60</sup> The museum had been primarily funded by Mina Fink, a prominent figure in the Melbourne Jewish community although not a Holocaust survivor herself.<sup>61</sup> She dedicated the museum's original building to her late husband Leo Fink, who had been a major figure in the Australian Jewish community, particularly for his work with the United

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<sup>56</sup> Steven Cooke, and Donna-Lee Frieze. "Shifting Responses to Antisemitism and Racism: Temporary Exhibitions at the Jewish Holocaust Centre." in *Holocaust Memory and Racism in the Postwar World*, ed. Shirli Gilbert and Arvil Alba (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 327.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>59</sup> Winter, 'Thinking about Silence', 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Cooke, and Frieze. "Shifting Responses to Antisemitism and Racism", 327.

Jewish Overseas Relief Fund.<sup>62</sup> This organisation had been established in 1943 by Leo and Mina to financially aid Holocaust survivors and assist in their resettlement to Australia.<sup>63</sup> Together they had played a major role in shaping post-war Melbourne to have 'proportionately the highest percentage of Holocaust survivors of any diaspora Jewish community'.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, the site that was chosen for the museum, the Melbourne suburb of Elsternwick, was significant because it was in the heart of 'a vibrant Jewish area'.<sup>65</sup> The 'neighbored locality' of the museum allowed Holocaust survivors to feel comfortable and 'at home' in the space, a place in which 'they could share their stories, remember the dead, and feel connected to a unique survivor community'.<sup>66</sup> However, this did not limit the ultimate reach of the museum. During its creation and operation, the Holocaust survivors involved in the museum have been very clear and unified in their desire to educate the Australian public on the Holocaust. The choice of a museum rather than a memorial was significant in and of itself. Even though the content of the museum does commemorate those who died in the Holocaust, with their photographs and personal belongings on display, its aim has always been to with engage the Jewish and non-Jewish public alike in order to educate them about the Holocaust. While there had been tension within the British Jewry over the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, there was not the same degree of

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<sup>62</sup> Benjamin L. Rodney, 'Fink, Leo (1901-1972)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ed. John Ritchie and Christopher Cunneenn (Melbourne University Press, 1996). National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fink-leo-10183/text17993>>. Accessed 19 September 2021.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Berman, "Australian Representations of the Holocaust" 200-221.

<sup>65</sup> Cooke, and Frieze. "Shifting Responses to Antisemitism and Racism", 327.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

controversy attached to the Melbourne museum within the Australian Jewry. In 1983 *The Australian Jewish News* was very supportive about the plans for the museum, reporting that it had been 'praised by the Yad Vashem Centre in Israel'.<sup>67</sup> The lack of government support on the one hand, limited the overall funds and capabilities of the museum but on the other hand, its creators were not forced to make compromises with the government about the space, content, or messaging of the museum, unlike the Board of Deputies with the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial.

The compromises that the Board of Deputies had to make with the British government in order to build the memorial can be seen in its design and location. The two main issues that arose about the memorial were how prominent it would be and where it would be located. The debates around these issues highlighted the broad uneasiness in British society over the place of Jewish identity in public spaces. The memorial was contentious for drawing attention to the Jewish community, at a time when the acceptance of the Jewish community within British society was dependent on their discretion. In the initial discussion between Janner and Heseltine about the memorial, Heseltine was not concerned about the intolerance or anti-Semitism of any potential vandals of the memorial but instead 'saw Anglo-Jewry's insistence on remembering as the problem'.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Heseltine did agree to the memorial after Janner had reassured him that, if the memorial was vandalised, the Board of Deputies would ignore it, as they had done with other acts of anti-

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<sup>67</sup> "Commend museum", *The Australian Jewish News*, 2 December 1983, 35. Trove. <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article261332681>>. Accessed 15 September 2021

<sup>68</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 452.

Semitism. He disagreed with the choice of location though.<sup>69</sup> The proposal of The Jewel Gardens was rejected by Heseltine because he viewed it as 'one of the few remaining sites close to the Palace of Westminster which might provide a location for a Parliamentary or State memorial in the future'.<sup>70</sup>

To emphasise that the memorial was not associated with the government, Heseltine suggested instead two other possible locations, one close to Whitehall and another on the riverbank in front of Lambeth Palace.<sup>71</sup> Janner ultimately chose the site near Whitehall, although it came with the proviso from Heseltine that 'the close proximity of the Cenotaph would, of course call for very simple, restrained treatment'.<sup>72</sup> The announcement that the memorial's location would be near Whitehall caused growing concerns that Holocaust memory would intrude upon British war memory. Heseltine's emphasis on the memorial being 'simple' and 'restrained' because of its closeness to the Cenotaph reflected an anxiety that a Holocaust memorial would 'incur upon... the 'exclusive space' of British war memory'.<sup>73</sup> It was thought that by having Whitehall associated with a Holocaust memorial, 'the centrality of the Cenotaph and the heroic version of British history in World War II' would be damaged.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Michael Heseltine to Greville Janner, 20 September 1979, Yad Vashem (UK) Committee Archives quoted in Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 453.

<sup>71</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 453.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from Michael Heseltine to Greville Janner, 20 September 1979, Yad Vashem (UK) Committee Archives quoted in Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 453.

<sup>73</sup> Pearce, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain", 75.

<sup>74</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 456.

Critics of the Whitehall site were also concerned not just that the mnemonic space of the memorial would overshadow British war memory but also the 'desecration' it would inflict on the Cenotaph as a sacred space. They were serious concerns that the memorial would be vandalised or be destroyed by neo-fascists and that this would somehow lead to the other memorials in the area being damaged too.<sup>75</sup> It was ultimately for these 'security reasons' that the government withdrew their permission for the memorial to be located near Whitehall.<sup>76</sup> They offered instead a site within one of the Royal Parks.<sup>77</sup> Thus, as Cooke argues, 'What would have been a conspicuous monument in a central site of British war memory, near the Cenotaph, became an unobtrusive and marginal monument in Hyde Park'.<sup>78</sup> The relegation of the memorial's location from a site of significant national prominence to one that is concealed and out of sight from any established memory spaces showcased the continued uncertainty about the relevance of Holocaust memory and the tenuous position of the Jewish community in British society.

The vague and ambiguous nature of the memorial's design reflected the lack of consensus among those behind the scenes about what message the memorial should communicate and what meaning it should hold for the public. There were attempts by the Board of Deputies to not particularise the Holocaust as a Jewish only event and instead claim that the memorial was for all victims of the Holocaust regardless of their faith. However, considering that the memorial was campaigned for and funded by the Board of Deputies, the attempts to distance the Holocaust from a

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 457.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 461.

Jewish identity were ultimately unsuccessful. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Patrick Jenkin, at the memorial's dedication ceremony on 27 June 1983 stated that it was '...fitting that the Board should take the lead in this memorial, but there were, of course, others who died in the Holocaust, and it is, therefore, appropriate that the garden should commemorate the victims of all faiths'.<sup>79</sup> Yet it is only 'fitting' that the Board of Deputies took the lead in the memorial if the Jewish community were considered ultimately to be the primary victims of the Holocaust.



The Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial Garden<sup>80</sup>

The resulting design of the memorial reflects this 'delicate balancing act to portray the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial Garden as a monument to all victims of the Holocaust, whilst at the same time maintaining the Jews as the primary victims...'.<sup>81</sup> It consists of a large, engraved boulder within a small, gravelled patch surrounded

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<sup>79</sup> Jenni Frazer, 'Holocaust Garden Dedicated', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1 July 1983, 1. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.155171?highlight=Holocaust+garden>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

<sup>80</sup> "Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial Garden". The Big Note. May 17, 2012. <<http://thebignote.com/2012/05/17/hyde-park-holocaust-memorial-garden/>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity", 459.



by silver birch trees. On the boulder is an elusive dedication to the 'Holocaust Memorial Garden'. There is no mention of who the victims of the Holocaust were, who the perpetrators were or even when and where the Holocaust took place. Below this dedication is the inscription of a quote, firstly in Hebrew and then English, from the Book of Lamentations, in the Hebrew bible: 'For these I weep. Streams of tears flow from my eyes because of the destruction of my people'.



The Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial Garden<sup>82</sup>

Although Janner claimed the inscription would not 'leave anyone in doubt as to the nature or intent of the memorial', the lack of context about who these 'people' were does create an uncertainty around what meaning visitors are supposed to take away from it.<sup>83</sup> By refusing to commit to a message of Jewish particularity or universalism, the memorial is unsuccessful at conveying either. While it is obviously the intention of the design to be undefined, this approach dilutes the memorial's

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<sup>82</sup> "Holocaust Memorial, Hyde Park, London". Wikimedia Commons. 4 June 2007. <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holocaust\\_Mem\\_Hyde\\_Park.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holocaust_Mem_Hyde_Park.JPG)>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Grenville Janner, 'When the Turf Settles', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 15 July 1983, 16. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.155270?highlight=When+the+Turf+Settles>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

meaning and its impact. It means that the memorial is innocuous, unassuming, and easy to miss, or rather be dismissed, by passers-by. Janner emphasised that the memorial would 'forever blend into the park' as if to reassure the non-Jewish community that the memorial would not upset the delicate arrangement between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Britain.<sup>84</sup> Thus, while the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial was a major milestone in the history of Holocaust commemoration in the UK, it did not mean that Holocaust memory had become accepted or integrated into British public consciousness.

In contrast, the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre had a significant cultural impact. As early as 1986 *The Australian Jewish Times* reported that 'In existence for only two years, it's now being used increasingly by Victorian schools as a curriculum resource for the study of the Holocaust, part of the modern history syllabus for Higher School Certificate. The centre has already hosted 7000 non-Jewish children from more than 200 schools in Melbourne and surrounding country towns'.<sup>85</sup> Among its praises for the museum was the inclusion of the Holocaust survivors as guides because it enabled the transference of their experiences to the visitors on 'one to one basis'. This had been mentioned by several school children who visited the museum as a particularly 'impressive' part of their experience.<sup>86</sup> In Britain on the other hand, a Holocaust survivor complained to *The Jewish Chronicle* that she had been prevented from even entering the opening ceremony of the Hyde

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<sup>84</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 94.

<sup>85</sup> "Holocaust Centre a 'living museum'", *The Australian Jewish Times*, 8 May 1986, 13. Trove. <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263224467>>. Accessed 15 September 2021.

<sup>86</sup> "Holocaust museum praised", *The Australian Jewish Times*, 1 May 1986, 18. Trove. <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263224296>>. Accessed 15 September 2021.

Park Holocaust Memorial, while the Board of Deputies members 'were given pride of place'.<sup>87</sup> As well as educating the public on the Holocaust through its own exhibitions, the museum also set in motion the development of two further Holocaust museums in Australia. In October of 1986 *The Australian Jewish Times* announced that plans for a Sydney Jewish Museum on the Holocaust were being considered and that 'the experience of the Victorian Holocaust Museum which regularly attracts large parties of schoolchildren from all over Victoria' had been mentioned in support of the project.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in 1989 *The Australian Jewish Times* announced that a Holocaust museum was to be built in Perth and would be 'modelled on Melbourne's centre but on a smaller scale'.<sup>89</sup>



Opening of the Jewish Holocaust Centre in 1984<sup>90</sup>

Part of the success of the Melbourne museum, and other Holocaust museums in Australia, has been because they have rejected using universal messaging in their

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<sup>87</sup> Freda Wineman, "A Survivor Excluded", Letter to the Editor, *The Jewish Chronicle* 8 July 1983, 16. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.155226>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

<sup>88</sup> "Holocaust museum plan", *The Australian Jewish Times*, 16 October 1986, 3. Trove. <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263213560>>. Accessed 15 September 2021.

<sup>89</sup> "Holocaust museum", *The Australian Jewish Times*, 1 September 1989, 12. Trove. <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263179167>>. Accessed 15 September 2021.

<sup>90</sup> "History of the JHC". The Jewish Holocaust Centre. <<https://jhc.org.au/about-us/history-of-the-jhc/>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

exhibitions.<sup>91</sup> As a result of the museum being privately operated, it did not foist nationalistic or humanistic narratives onto the Holocaust, as was the case in Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.<sup>92</sup> The designers of the Melbourne museum committed to a Jewish particularistic approach, although this has shifted somewhat over the years to include messages of tolerance and anti-racism.<sup>93</sup> An important element that is often overlooked is the experience of the visitor at Holocaust museums and memorials. For an uninformed visitor the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial is illusive, difficult to understand, and hidden away. It is only really useful to those who already know about the Holocaust and are seeking out the memorial. As observed in a letter to *The Jewish Chronicle* in 1983 after the memorial's dedication, 'If future generations are to remember and to learn then they must be told' and what was inscribed on the memorial 'will not inform the uninformed but will serve only to remind those who know already'.<sup>94</sup> In comparison, the Melbourne museum invites understanding with its displays of artifacts and photographs which are easily accessible for visitor and are often supplemented with a Holocaust survivor as their guide. As a result, the resonance of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial is notably lacking, and it did not inspire further Holocaust remembrance in Britain.

In conclusion, the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial was the result of a top down, elite driven campaign which had to undergone extensive compromises and negotiations

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<sup>91</sup> Berman, "Australian Representations of the Holocaust", 202.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 200-201.

<sup>93</sup> Cooke, and Frieze. "Shifting Responses to Antisemitism and Racism", 345.

<sup>94</sup> June Jacobs, "A Survivor Excluded", Letter to the Editor, *The Jewish Chronicle* 8 July 1983, 16. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.155226>> Accessed 10 August 2021.

with the British state in order to be built. It was developed at a time in which the relationship between the British Jewry and non-Jewish public had been strained by interwar anti-Semitism and their position, especially of the Jewish elites, in British society was tenuous. Yet it was only because of the status of these Jewish elites that the government entertained the plans for the memorial and ultimately their campaign was a success. In spite of this achievement, and in contrast to the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre, the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial failed to have a lasting cultural impact. This difference is partly the result of the two projects' divergent forms of remembrance, one being a memorial to commemorate, the other a museum to educate. However, given that their developments paralleled each other, the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial showcased a greater hesitancy in British society to engage with Holocaust memory. In Australia on the other hand, there was a large grassroots Jewish community, especially in Melbourne, that drove the Australian Holocaust consciousness forward. Although their position was not great enough for the government to fund or support the establishment of the museum, the fact that the Jewish community felt encouraged to create it in spite of this reflected their less insecure position within Australian society. Furthermore, as a result of the lack of state involvement in the museum there was the opportunity for the more meaningful involvement of local Holocaust survivors. This was the most significant element of the museum's success and was utterly absent in the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial. The lasting cultural influence of the two sites differs dramatically as the Melbourne museum inspired the creation of two more Holocaust museum in Australia while there was not another significant development in British Holocaust consciousness until the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition 17 years later.

## Chapter Two

### The Institutionalisation of Holocaust Memory: The Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition and Holocaust Memorial Day

The following chapter examines the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition in London, established in 2000, and the initiation of Britain's annual Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001 as the two major turning points in the institutionalisation of British Holocaust memory. The historical debates that are stimulated, or at least brought to the forefront, in this period by these developments centre around Britain's position on the Holocaust uniqueness debate, Jewish particularism versus universalism, and Holocaust commemoration versus education. A comparison will be made to Australia's Sydney Jewish Museum, established in 1992, in order to highlight the significance of the curatorial decisions behind the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition. The museums are in many ways the antithesis of each other because of the different levels of involvement of Holocaust survivors behind the scenes and the museums' opposing aims to serve an either educational or commemorative function. As a result of these factors, the shape and character of Britain's official Holocaust memory becomes clearly defined in this period. The Imperial War Museum's conceptualisation of Holocaust memory incorporated it into the established narratives of British war memory. This approach is mirrored by the state-run Holocaust Memorial Day, which emphasised the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a way to avoid discussions of Britain's own violent history and

reinforced an uncritical British national identity that focuses on their war time heroism instead. It will be shown that the institutionalisation of Britain's Holocaust memory has in many ways lead to the use of Holocaust memory as a national and political tool. And while this is not necessarily an uncommon approach, the comparison to Australia's Sydney Jewish Museum demonstrates that it was not an inevitable outcome.

Historians disagree about when the major 'turning point' for Holocaust consciousness in Britain occurred. Some historians such as have Andy Pearce argued that it was in the 1980s, while others such as Tony Kushner have argued it was not until the 1990s that the Holocaust became 'a subject of major interest'.<sup>95</sup> However, Suzanne Bardgett has argued that we only see a major shift in the prevalence of Holocaust consciousness in the early 2000s.<sup>96</sup> The approach of this chapter is that Holocaust consciousness first emerged in wider British society during the late 1970s, gained momentum in the 1990s, and that by the early 2000s Holocaust memory became an integral part of Britain's public consciousness. The early 2000s was indeed one of the most significant periods for Holocaust consciousness in Britain because much of the conceptualisations and debates around Holocaust memory occurred during this time. As we saw in the previous chapter, before the late 1970s there had been little commemorative activity around the Holocaust in Britain outside of Jewish communities. The combination during the 1970s of an increased

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<sup>95</sup> Andy Pearce, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain, 1979-2001.", *Holocaust Studies* 14, no. 2 (2008): 81.

<sup>96</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "David Cesarani and the Creation of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition", in *The Jews, the Holocaust, and the Public*, ed. Larissa Allwork and Rachel Pistol (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 299.

awareness of the Holocaust within the non-Jewish public, alongside an increased dissatisfaction from the Jewish communities with the lack of Holocaust commemoration in Britain led to the construction of Britain's first official Holocaust memorial in Hyde Park in 1983, founded by the Jewish Board of Deputies. Although the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial represented a shift in Holocaust remembrance from existing primarily within the Jewish communities to becoming a part of British public life, it was still very much shaped by the position of the Jewish community within British society. In comparison, the developments in Holocaust memory during the early 2000s are marked by considerably less involvement from the Jewish community. Instead, the responsibility is taken over by the British state and official institutions, and it is at this point that we see a substantial peak in Holocaust memory activity in Britain.

Suzanne Bardgett, who had led the team behind the exhibition, has argued that the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibition 'was ahead of its time. The Holocaust as a subject had yet to become the mainstream event in British public consciousness that it attained in the early 2000s – in large part down to the advent and embedding of Holocaust Memorial Day in the national calendar'.<sup>97</sup> Importantly, much of the rhetoric we see in the Holocaust Memorial Days over the last twenty years can be attributed to the themes and narratives established by the Holocaust exhibition. In particular, the inclusion of the exhibition within a museum which is 'as close as Britain comes to a national history museum' that focuses on British war memory reflected, or rather precipitated, Britain's understanding of the Holocaust in the 21st

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<sup>97</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 299.



century.<sup>98</sup> Instead of being in competition with Britain's war memory, as it was in the early 1980s with the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, Holocaust memory became incorporated into it. The events of the Holocaust were woven into the narrative of the Second World War and, in order to make it relevant to the British public, Britain was cast as the antithesis of Nazi Germany. Within this embedded narrative the end of the war became equated with the end of the Holocaust, and so the role of the British as the heroes of the war became conflated with their role as 'liberators' of the Holocaust. As Hannah Holtschneider has argued, the exhibition 'presents a coherent interpretation of the history of the Holocaust for the British public which can be neatly slotted into the prevailing discourse on national identity and the use of the past for the needs of the present'.<sup>99</sup> Unlike the previous decades, the issues that arise in this period, in regard to the Imperial War Museum and Holocaust Memorial Day, centre around *how*, not *if*, the Holocaust should be represented. The decisions these two institutions made to address these issues, particularly the amalgamation of Holocaust memory within British war memory, revealed the function that the Holocaust would start to play in Britain's national identity as a result of the shift to a state-controlled Holocaust remembrance, rather than one produced by the Jewish community.

A significant transition in the development of Britain's Holocaust consciousness that has not yet been addressed by historians is that the Imperial War Museum's

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<sup>98</sup> Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce, "Britain and the Holocaust: An Introduction", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, ed. Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 1.

<sup>99</sup> Hannah Holtschneider, "Holocaust Representation in the Imperial War Museum, 2000–2020" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, ed. Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 390.

Holocaust Exhibition was the first instance of Holocaust remembrance in Britain that was not organised by the British Jewish community. In fact, a major feature of the museum's exhibition is that it is profoundly disconnected from the Jewish community. The Imperial War Museum had been established in 1917 during the First World War as 'partly a propaganda move, partly a sincere attempt to record the war'.<sup>100</sup> From its inception the museum has therefore had at its core an agenda to record British history while at the same time bolstering a public identity. The museum's Board of Trustees, who were in charge of the Holocaust Exhibition, had no connection to the Jewish community.<sup>101</sup> They were instead members of the British elite and had close connections to the British government. Even though Bardgett claims that the Imperial War Museum's proposal for a Holocaust exhibition in 1994 predated a significant interest from the British public in Holocaust memory, nevertheless Chad McDonald has argued that the leadership behind the Imperial War Museum '...showed a lack of understanding about how the Holocaust was increasingly being understood in Britain as an event that required separate and specific attention'.<sup>102</sup>

We can see this in their initial hesitancy to commit to exhibition that focused solely on the Holocaust. While Bardgett has claimed that the installation of an exhibition focused on the Holocaust was always the intention of the museum, historians such as McDonald have argued that their original proposal was to have an exhibition that

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<sup>100</sup> Goynor Kavanagh, "Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum." *Journal of contemporary history* 23, no. 1 (1988): 94.

<sup>101</sup> Bardgett, 'David Cesarani', 298.

<sup>102</sup> Chad McDonald, "Negotiating Memory and Agency: David Cesarani and the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition (2000)" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, ed. Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) 411.

centred on 'Man's Inhumanity to Man' in which the Holocaust would have been 'incorporated the Holocaust alongside other acts of 'inhumanity''.<sup>103</sup> By the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1995 *The Jewish Chronicle* reported that the Imperial War Museum's director-general Alan Borg had stated that the new exhibition would be 'devoted largely, though not exclusively, to the Holocaust', and would take inspiration from the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles which deals 'more broadly with genocide'.<sup>104</sup> This concept of a more generalised or comparative exhibition faced fierce opposition from both historians and the Jewish community. The Board of Deputies Vice-President Eric Moonman told *The Jewish Chronicle* that there were 'questions' as to whether the exhibition's plans went 'far enough to meet the requirements of the Jewish community'.<sup>105</sup> The museum's leadership did not appreciate the ongoing frustrations from the Jewish community, left unresolved by the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, with Britain's lack of public Holocaust commemorations. Furthermore, the implications inherent in placing the Holocaust within a comparative exhibition triggered criticism from historians such as David Cesarani, who 'lambasted the concept for emphasising universal human suffering rather than the specific Nazi policy towards the Jews'.<sup>106</sup>

This criticism reflected ongoing international debates within the historical field, originating from the late 1980s, about whether the Holocaust was a 'unique'

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<sup>103</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 298; McDonald, "Negotiating Memory", 410.

<sup>104</sup> Simon Roker, "Board Leader Voices Doubts Over Plans for Holocaust Museum" *The Jewish Chronicle*, 21 April 1995, 7. The Jewish Chronicle Archive.

<<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.311588?highlight=Holocaust+Museum>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> McDonald, "Negotiating Memory", 410.

historical event or if it could be compared to other genocides and situated within a pattern of mass violence in the twentieth century. To this day the debate has remained largely unresolved and become highly politicised. In the original historian's debate, known as the *Historikerstreit*, between the German historians Ernst Nolte and Jürgen Habermas in 1986, the issue of the Holocaust's 'uniqueness' became conflated with a judgement on the severity of the Nazism regime. Conservative historians, like Nolte, made the argument that the Holocaust needed to be contextualised within the violent history of the twentieth century.<sup>107</sup> However, left wing historians, like Habermas, criticised this approach because they saw it as an attempt to downplay the severity of the Holocaust.<sup>108</sup> They argued that it 'trivialised' and 'relativised' the Holocaust.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, attempts to compare the Holocaust to other genocides or challenge its uniqueness as a historical event have become equated with the argument that the Holocaust is not an important or a significantly 'tragic' event. A person's position on the debate is not just a matter of historical opinion but has become politically and morally charged.

We see this attitude reflected in Cesarani's complaint to *The Jewish Chronicle* that by taking a universal approach, rather than a Jewish particular one, the Imperial War Museum's plans would 'belittle the enormity of the Holocaust' and be 'tantamount

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<sup>107</sup> Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Port, "Holocaust Scholarship and Politics in the Public Sphere: Reexamining the Causes, Consequences, and Controversy of the Historikerstreit and the Goldhagen Debate: A Forum with Gerrit Dworok, Richard J. Evans, Mary Fulbrook, Wendy Lower, A. Dirk Moses, Jeffrey K. Olick, and Timothy D. Snyder" *Central European History* 50, no. 3 (September 2017): 377.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

to relativizing the Holocaust'.<sup>110</sup> After sustained pressure from historians and the Jewish community, the Imperial War Museum eventually relented, and the Holocaust was reaffirmed as the central subject of the exhibition by mid 1995. This established the position that would come to dominate official British Holocaust memory in the 21st century in regard to the Holocaust's uniqueness, which became further emphasised by Holocaust Memorial Day. The revised plans for the exhibition were praised by the Board of Deputies and it gained endorsement from several key organisations including the Holocaust Education Trust and the Wiener Library.<sup>111</sup> However, this signalled the relative end of the Jewish communities' involvement in the exhibition. The ultimate decision to have a Holocaust exhibition at such an important British museum was a significant development in Britain's Holocaust consciousness and its singular focus on the Holocaust asserted its uniqueness in British memory.

Once the decision had been made to build the exhibition, attention turned to the task of creating its content. One of the key influences behind the design and content of the Holocaust exhibition was David Cesarani, who had been appointed to the exhibition's Advisory Group in 1996.<sup>112</sup> McDonald has claimed that 'During the 1990s and early 2000s, David Cesarani cemented his place as a – if not the – key intellectual figure associated with Holocaust remembrance in Britain'.<sup>113</sup> His

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<sup>110</sup> Simon Roker, "Historian Attacks 'Inappropriate' Plan for UK Holocaust Museum" *The Jewish Chronicle*, 16 June 1995, 8. The Jewish Chronicle Archive. <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.204934?highlight=Holocaust+Museum>>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

<sup>111</sup> McDonald, "Negotiating Memory", 412.

<sup>112</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 298.

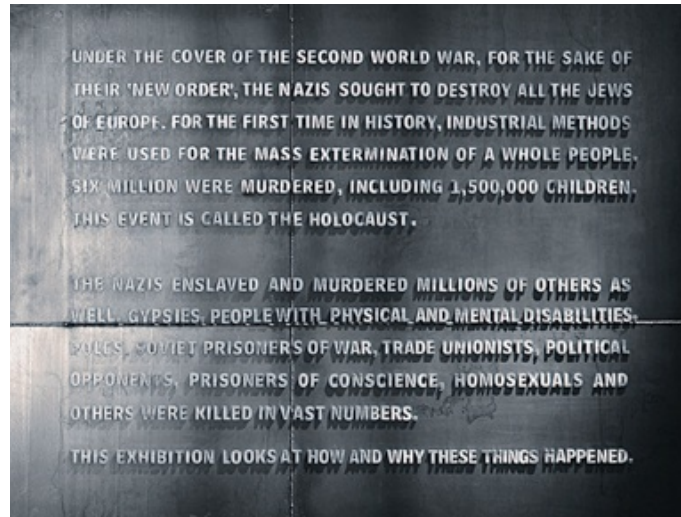
<sup>113</sup> McDonald, "Negotiating Memory", 405.

influence on the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition was particularly important in shaping Britain's Holocaust consciousness. Bardgett herself has stated that 'David Cesarani was crucial to the exhibition's success' and that 'his interventions during this process were critical to the eventual approval that the exhibition gained in academic circles and more widely'.<sup>114</sup> Part of this success can be attributed to his approach, mentioned earlier, of Jewish particularism over universalism when representing the Holocaust. Jewish particularism conceives of the Holocaust as an event that particularly targeted the Jews rather than universalising it as an example of general human suffering. It also became enmeshed with the Holocaust uniqueness debate because, if the Holocaust is understood as an exclusively Jewish atrocity, it becomes more of a 'singular' event. Although Cesarani prioritised Jewish particularism, he tried to reconcile it with the idea that the Holocaust is an event which can still teach universal lessons. As McDonald puts it, 'Cesarani maintained a clear conceptualisation of Holocaust remembrance that foregrounded the Jewish victims. He believed that this particularity must sit alongside an emphasis on the universal lessons the Holocaust could teach all sections of British society'.<sup>115</sup> This clear and well-defined message is apparent throughout the exhibition and addresses one of the major flaws of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, which was its refusal to commit to either approach.

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<sup>114</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 297.

<sup>115</sup> McDonald, "Negotiating Memory", 408.



Holocaust Exhibition's opening foyer<sup>116</sup>

One of the most significant examples of Cesarani's approach in the exhibition is in the opening foyer. On the left side of the entrance, sitting adjacent to an exhibit on life before the Nazis, there is an exhibit with rolling footage of German militarism encased in a steel wall accompanied by the following words:

'Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their 'New Order', the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million people were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.'<sup>117</sup>

Although a relatively simple exhibit, it is imbued with significance. As we saw in the previous chapter, there had been major indecision in Britain during the 1980s over the meaning of the Holocaust. This had been reflected in the substantial back and forth from the Board of Deputies members over whether the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial was for the *Jewish* victims of the Holocaust or *all* victims of Nazi

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<sup>116</sup> "Imperial War Museum". Lucy Or Robert. <<http://www.either.co.uk/projects/the-holocaust-exhibition>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Holtschneider, "Holocaust Representation", 395.

persecution. In the end the memorial included no definition of Holocaust. Thus, not only does the exhibition provide for the first time a clear definition of the Holocaust but also, as Pearce puts it, 'one with institutional authority and cultural weight' because of the Imperial War Museum's status as a respected British national museum.<sup>118</sup>

However, the actual content of the definition underwent a significant change late in the exhibition's development. The original version was much more inclusive about who the victims of the Holocaust were. It began, 'Under the cover of the Second World War, the Nazis systematically murdered more than 14 million people'.<sup>119</sup> It then followed with much of the same wording but, significantly, the fact that 'The Nazis enslaved or suppressed other groups as well' was included as part of the events 'called the Holocaust' rather than separate from it as in the final version.<sup>120</sup> This was the direct influence of Cesarani and the Advisory Group who took serious issue with the universal language of the original version and its implication that the Jewish victims were not the primary victims of the Holocaust.<sup>121</sup> The final version tried to balance the demands of Jewish particularism and universalism by defining the Jews as the victims of the Holocaust while also indicating that there were other victims of Nazi persecution. It is from this point that a predominantly Jewish particular approach, with elements of universalism, becomes the accepted method of representing the Holocaust in Britain.

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<sup>118</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*, 121.

<sup>119</sup> McDonald, "Negotiating Memory", 415.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 416.



Although numerous historians have provided a critical analysis of the exhibition, most do not offer any in depth examples of how the museum could have structured their exhibition differently. As Rebecca Jinks has summarised, the three main areas that have attracted the most criticisms from historians are ‘the museum’s overall portrayal of the perpetrators, the victims and the British responses to the Holocaust’.<sup>122</sup> Many of these issues correspond directly to the areas that Cesarani was overruled on by the exhibition’s team. Thus, they need to be understood as intentional choices that the exhibition’s team made in order to shape the exhibition to the museum’s own purposes and dogmas. By failing to provide any alternative options that the museum could have taken, the exhibition team’s choices almost seem inevitable, and it becomes less clear that they were the result of key influences behind the scenes. Their significance is left unexplored and undervalued.

It is thus useful to offer as a point of comparison another Holocaust museum that was operating at the same time that the exhibition was being developed.

Comparisons have been frequently been made between the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is understandable because the creation of the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition was heavily influenced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. However, a valuable comparison that has so far been overlooked is between the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition and the Sydney Jewish

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<sup>122</sup> Rebecca Jinks, “Holocaust Memory and Contemporary Atrocities: The Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition and Crimes Against Humanity Exhibition” in *Britain and the Holocaust*, ed. Caroline Sharples and Olaf Jensen (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 143.

Museum, which opened in 1992. The two museums are in many ways the antithesis of each other. For instance, one is a *Jewish* museum whereas the other is a *war* museum with no connection to the Jewish community at all.

While the remainder of this chapter does not engage in a detailed analysis of the Sydney Jewish Museum, it highlights several sites of comparison that reveal key insights into the differences between the museums. The comparison is useful because the two countries, Britain and Australia, have had a similar relationship to the Holocaust. Many of the issues the Imperial War Museum faced with their Holocaust exhibit were related to Britain's relationship to the Holocaust. Like Australia, Britain was neither a victim nor perpetrator country but had played a major role in Second World War and received an influx of Holocaust survivors after the war. Thus, the two countries approached representing the Holocaust from a similar starting position and yet made very different curatorial choices.

We can see the difference between the two museums in their approaches to the issues highlighted by Jinks, particularly around the representation of the victims and the perpetrators. A contentious issue within the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition was how much space should be given to the Nazi perpetrators. Bardgett recalls that Cesarani was worried that certain areas of the exhibition, especially the upper floor, were becoming 'too devoted to the Nazis and their policies'.<sup>123</sup> According to Bardgett, 'He and Martin Smith were anxious that the SA and SS uniforms and other Nazi emblems would have the wrong effect, particularly on

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<sup>123</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 301.

young people'.<sup>124</sup> However, the museum team pushed back. Apparently, 'the team had strong views: The Holocaust did not 'appear out of the ether'. It had been organized and our public needed to understand the people who did that'.<sup>125</sup> As a result, 'the perspective of the murderers' is privileged in the exhibition over that of victims because it was the easiest way to construct a cohesive narrative.<sup>126</sup> The events of Holocaust are arranged in a narrative that is driven forward by the actions of the Nazis and so they become the 'protagonists' of the exhibition. This attention that is given to the Nazi regime does not equate with an in depth or nuanced historical representation. In fact, this approach, as Holtschneider has argued, 'has the consequence of obliterating any historical complexity which cannot be assimilated into a characterisation of the Nazi regime as a coherent, ideologically driven genocidal project which contrasts sharply with British liberal values'.<sup>127</sup>



Display at the Holocaust Exhibition<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Holtschneider, "Holocaust Representation", 396.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 400.

<sup>128</sup> Staff Reporter. "Holocaust Galleries of Hitler's Horror". *Southwark News*. 14 October 2021. <<https://www.southwarknews.co.uk/news/48931-2/>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

Rather than providing a comprehensive understanding of the Nazis, a caricature of the Nazis is used instead to reinforce the wider nationalist narrative of the Imperial War Museum and strengthen Britain's own sense of identity. Jinks has attempted to justify that the overall focus the Nazi perpetrators in the exhibition is, to an extent, counteracted by the use of video and oral survivor testimonies.<sup>129</sup> She has stated that 'while on the upstairs floor the vibrant klezmer music of the atrium and the survivor testimonies compete with, or are overshadowed by, the thundering of Nazi rallies and Goebbels' propaganda speeches, those sounds do not penetrate downstairs and only survivors' voices punctuate the silence'.<sup>130</sup> However, the very fact that Nazi voices and propaganda drown out those of survivors on any level could be viewed as inappropriate and insensitive. While those behind the exhibition had attempted to achieve a balance between representing the Jewish victims and the Nazi perpetrators, the reactions to the exhibition suggest they were not as successful as they had intended. Ultimately the perspective of the Nazi perpetrators was more 'useful' for telling the narrative that exhibition team wished to achieve and so they dominate the exhibition.

While it may seem natural and self-evident that a national Holocaust museum would approach representing the Nazis this way, the Sydney Jewish Museum made the radical decision to almost entirely remove representations of the Nazis from their museum. It is unique for its focus on the survivors and shaping the museum from their perspective rather than trying to balance between the perspectives of victims

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<sup>129</sup> Jinks, "Holocaust Memory", 144.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

and perpetrators. In sharp contrast to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibit, 'there is no film footage of Nazi rallies, no Nazi uniforms are displayed, and it is museum policy that no artefacts are to be purchased'.<sup>131</sup> This was 'due to initial concerns about survivor sensitivities', which the Imperial War Museum's team did not share.<sup>132</sup> We can clearly see their lack of sensitivity in their response to Cesarani voicing his reservations about displaying artifacts that had been used for torture or violence. For example, 'He wondered how survivors would react to seeing clubs and whips that had been used in the camps' and objected to the inclusion of a hospital dissecting table because it would make 'a minor, if bizarre, feature of Nazi activity into a focal point'.<sup>133</sup> However, Bardgett has stated that 'For the team working with such material though, there was a united response. 'If we don't show the horror – even with brutal artefacts – we will be underplaying the subject and doing a disservice to it'.<sup>134</sup> The paramount concerns for the team were the 'truthfulness' of the exhibition and presenting an entirely 'accurate' representation of the Holocaust, regardless of emotional impact it might on the survivors. As we have seen, this approach, while intended to be balanced, in practice led to a disproportionate focus on the Nazis in order to fit the events of the Holocaust into the overall war focused narrative of the museum. Even though it is understandable how the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibit arrived at a perpetrator led narrative, the Sydney Jewish Museum shows that it was possible to have an alternative narrative that was victim led instead.

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<sup>131</sup> Avril Alba, "Integrity and Relevance: Shaping Holocaust Memory and the Sydney Jewish Museum." *Judaism* 54, no. 1 (2005): 110.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 302.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.



Olga Horak with her artifact at the Sydney Jewish Museum<sup>135</sup>

The disparity between the approaches of these museums can be attributed to two main influences behind the scenes. Firstly, the different levels of involvement of Holocaust survivors in the museums and secondly, the different educational and commemorative purposes at the core of the museums. As Alba has stated, 'Built by Survivors and in memory of those who did not survive, the initial memorial intent of the SJM [The Sydney Jewish Museum] was clearly defined'.<sup>136</sup> The Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition on the other hand, like the national Holocaust museums in the United States and Israel, was created by an official institution, not by the initiative of survivors. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after the Second World War Australia received, with the exception of Israel, the largest number of Holocaust survivors in the world and it 'profoundly changed the landscape of the Australia Jewish community'.<sup>137</sup> The influence of Holocaust survivors in Britain had been notably less impactful. Furthermore, in contrast to most Holocaust museums,

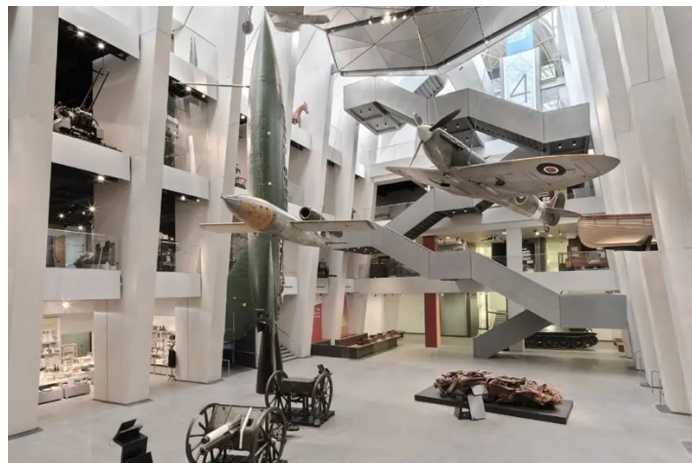
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<sup>135</sup> Heather McHab, "Holocaust survivor Olga Horak shares story of liberation as Jewish Museum celebrates 25 years", *The Daily Telegraph*. 21 November 2017. <<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/central-sydney/holocaust-survivor-olga-horek-shares-story-of-liberation-as-jewish-museum-celebrates-25-years/news-story/61a9cf16d86a4cec72ba71bdb3530694>>. Accessed 24 October 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Alba, "Integrity and Relevance", 108.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition was clear that it would not have 'a memorial element, since this would be at odds with the general purpose of the Museum, which is to educate rather than to commemorate'.<sup>138</sup> This purely educational imperative is reflected in the fact that the key influences behind the scenes were historians such as Cesarani rather than Holocaust survivors. Although Bardgett has argued that the team behind the exhibition were well researched and dedicated to the task, their position to the Holocaust was fundamentally different to that of Holocaust survivors and thus so were their priorities.<sup>139</sup> We can see that clearly in their responses to how much focus should be given to the Nazi perpetrators versus the Jewish victims and their choice of artifacts.



Imperial War Museum's Atrium<sup>140</sup>

Although the Imperial War Museum has claimed not to 'preach' to its visitors what they should think and feel, the very nature of the museum itself influences their interpretation of the Holocaust.<sup>141</sup> Before visitors even enter the exhibition, they are

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<sup>138</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*, 119.

<sup>139</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 300.

<sup>140</sup> Riccardo Bianchini, "IWM London new galleries | War by the eyes of people". Inexhibit. <<https://www.inexhibit.com/case-studies/war-eyes-people-iwm-london-new-galleries/>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*, 127.

surrounded by narratives of Britain's military exploits, most prominently the deeply nationalistic narratives around the two world wars. The exhibition positions the Holocaust within the framework of the Second World War, beginning with Jewish life just before the war and ending with the British liberation of Belsen. In comparison, Alba has argued that, 'the SJM exhibition does not attempt to recast the Holocaust experience into either a humanist or nationalist mould. In the words of the SJM's first curator, Sylvia Rosenbaum, "one cannot use the Holocaust to tell other stories."<sup>142</sup> As a privately funded museum the Sydney Jewish Museum was free from any obligations to fit the Holocaust into a wider Australian national narrative. Yet the story of Britain's involvement in the Second World War is from the onset embedded in the Imperial War Museum's exhibition.

As an educational institution whose goal was 'to deliver an exhibition which provided a large amount of historical content while still retaining the public's concentration', it placed the Holocaust within a wider grand narrative of Britain's history in order to make more apparent its relevance to a British audience and reaffirm a positive image of Britain.<sup>143</sup> Thus, the main reasons that the Imperial War Museum did not follow the path of the Sydney Jewish Museum was because survivors did not have a significant role in the development of its Holocaust exhibition and because the Imperial War Museum claimed to have a purely educational the purpose rather than a serve any memorial function. These factors begin to shift with the development of Holocaust Memorial Day as it has a combined

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<sup>142</sup> Alba, "Integrity and Relevance", 110.

<sup>143</sup> Bardgett, "David Cesarani", 298.



purpose of commemoration and education in its directive, and survivors play a key role, if only performatively, in its ceremonies.

Within a year of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition opening, the first national ceremony of Holocaust Memorial Day was held on the 27th of January 2001 at Westminster Central Hall. The inauguration of Holocaust Memorial Day was, as David Tollerton has put it, 'a crucial turning point in how commemorative and educational activities have been staged at the start of the 21st century'.<sup>144</sup> Many of the conceptual frameworks that were established in the Imperial War Museum, such as the incorporation of Holocaust memory into British War memory and Jewish particularism, carried over into the ideology of Holocaust Memorial Day. But other issues like the Holocaust's uniqueness and Britain's accountability come further to the forefront. The proposal of an official British national day to commemorate the Holocaust had been announced on the 27th of January 2000, after the British government had signed a declaration at the Stockholm International Forum on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research to commit to 'preserving the memory of those murdered in the Holocaust'.<sup>145</sup> According to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'This declaration became the statement of commitment which is still used as a basis for the HMD activities today'.<sup>146</sup> By linking the establishment of Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day with the Stockholm declaration it was

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<sup>144</sup> David Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory and Britain's Religious-Secular Landscape: Politics, Sacrality, and Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 105.

<sup>145</sup> "The Stockholm Declaration". Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. <<https://www.hmd.org.uk/what-is-holocaust-memorial-day/the-stockholm-declaration/>>. Accessed 1 September 2021.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

legitimised in the eyes of the international community.<sup>147</sup> As Kara Critchell has argued, 'The institutionalisation of the Holocaust was, in many ways, the institutionalisation of a cosmopolitan morality that reflected wider trends across Europe at this time'.<sup>148</sup>

In the first few years Holocaust Memorial Day was the responsibility of the Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills. This responsibility was transferred to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust from 2006. The initial 'state-sponsored control' of the day raised a significant amount of criticism from historians at the time who were concerned that it would prevent critical interrogations of Britain's actions during the Holocaust or their history with colonial violence. To this day, even after its transfer to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Critchell has argued that 'HMD is being utilised as a means by which to evoke specific values for the furthering of very particular political agendas'.<sup>149</sup> This highlights a key feature of this new phase in the development of Britain's Holocaust consciousness, its use as a political tool.

Controversy has surrounded Holocaust Memorial Day from its onset. Before the first Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony was even held, there were substantial debates between historians over whether Britain 'needed' a Holocaust Memorial Day and what the ideological implications of that day would be. The most famous of these

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<sup>147</sup> Andy Pearce, "The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain, 1979-2001.", *Holocaust Studies* 14, no. 2 (2008): 87.

<sup>148</sup> Kara Critchell, "From Celebrating Diversity to British Values: The Changing Face of Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain". in *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, ed. Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 431.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 430.

debates occurred between the historians Dan Stone and David Cesarani in 2000. The main concerns that Stone had with concept of Holocaust Memorial Day were firstly that it would be 'ignored by large sections of the population', secondly that it would 'encourage people... to forget the Holocaust during the rest of the year' and thirdly, most importantly, that 'The day will act as a convenient opportunity for the government to present itself as morally upright, thereby occluding involvement in contemporary ethnic, religious or other forms of discrimination'.<sup>150</sup> In hindsight the first two scenarios have not eventuated and Cesarani, in his response to Stone's concerns, argued that the public response to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition's recent opening had showed that 'substantial numbers of the British public can and do connect with the events of the Nazi era, and the fate of the Jews in particular'.<sup>151</sup> Stone's last concern on the other hand is not so easily dismissed.

According to Stone, 'The problem for Britain is obvious: since commemoration of the Holocaust does not derive from a shared experience of it, the question of who decides on what form the commemoration takes, who it will include and what it will seek to achieve is highly politicized'.<sup>152</sup> However, as we saw with both the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre in the previous chapter and the Sydney Jewish Museum, in Australia they have managed on the whole to avoid a politization of Holocaust memory because their museums were founded and supported by Holocaust survivors and the Jewish community rather than the state. This is, to an

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<sup>150</sup> Dan Stone, "Day of Remembrance or Day of Forgetting? Or, Why Britain Does Not Need a Holocaust Memorial Day". *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2000): 53.

<sup>151</sup> David Cesarani, "Seizing the Day: Why Britain Will Benefit from Holocaust Memorial Day". *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2000): 62.

<sup>152</sup> Stone, "Day of Remembrance", 56.

extent, the justification that Cesarani attempted to give in response to Stone's concerns about how the state would shape the ideology behind Holocaust Memorial Day. He claimed that before there was any interest from the wider public in Holocaust memory 'the Holocaust survivors, former refugees, Jewish ex-servicemen and others in Britain kept alive the memory.... The persistence of this memory from below means that the government cannot simply shape memory as it wishes and for its own purposes'.<sup>153</sup> Even so, as we have seen in the Imperial War Museum, this group did not have a particularly strong influence in Britain over either the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial or the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition. British elites, state officials, and institutions in both these cases had ultimately drowned out the voices of Holocaust survivors and refugees. Thus, the use of Holocaust Memorial Day by the state to reinforce a positive national identity in line with political agendas was a valid concern, one that continues to be true even after it was no longer state controlled.

The concerns about how Holocaust Memorial Day conceptualised British Holocaust memory persisted even after the first few Holocaust Memorial Days had been held. Tollerton has surmised that there were three main areas of concerns about Holocaust Memorial Day including 'accusations of government hypocrisy..., a lack of critical engagement with wider British history... and even questions of whether the state is best positioned to structure remembrance of what was itself a state-led atrocity'.<sup>154</sup> These issues had been voiced by historian Donald Bloxham in 2002. Bloxham had

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<sup>153</sup> Cesarani, "Seizing the Day", 64.

<sup>154</sup> Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory*, 106.

been concerned not necessarily about what was *included* in Holocaust Memorial Day but rather what was *excluded* from it. A major element of recent memory studies has been the focus on 'silence' and how, because of what goes *unsaid*, acts of remembrance can also be forms of forgetting.<sup>155</sup> Bloxham argued that the uniqueness of the Holocaust had been embedded in the rhetoric of Holocaust Memorial Day from its inception, made clear by the fact that it was singled out as an event worthy of being memorialised over other genocides.<sup>156</sup> Although commemorating other genocides is mentioned by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust as being part of the purpose of Holocaust Memorial Day, they are emphasised to be *subsequent* genocides.<sup>157</sup> Thus, the Holocaust's position as unique is reinforced because it is presented as a 'unprecedented rupture in history' from which all other genocides follow.<sup>158</sup>

British politicians have embraced this position with a particular fervour. As Tollerton notes, 'Amidst the House of Commons HMD debates affirmations of the Holocaust's uniqueness are commonplace, occasionally even with explicit awareness of the academic scepticism'.<sup>159</sup> The result of this emphasis on uniqueness in British public remembrance is that it has elevated the Holocaust to the moral standard of absolute 'evil'. All major historical events are therefore held up to that standard and are inherently implied to be lesser. One of the key reasons that British Holocaust

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<sup>155</sup> Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Chana Teeger. "Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting." *Social Forces* 88, no. 3 (2010): 1107.

<sup>156</sup> David Bloxham "Britain's holocaust memorial days: Reshaping the past in the service of the present", *Immigrants & Minorities* 21, no. 1-2 (2002): 43.

<sup>157</sup> "Mission and Strategy". Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. <<https://www.hmd.org.uk/about-us/mission-and-strategy/>>. Accessed 1 September 2021.

<sup>158</sup> Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory*, 110.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

remembrance has committed to this position is that it is useful for promoting an uncritical national identity because it downplays the severity of Britain's own history. As Bloxham stated, "Our' imperial record simply does not enter into the British collective memory as objectionable, and 'our' history of discriminations is seen as nowhere near as relevant as those visited by someone else'.<sup>160</sup> This is an example of what Ketil Knutsen has called 'adversarial silence' in which there is a suppression of the 'negative aspects of one's own history' in favour of the promotion of 'corresponding aspects of one's opponent's history'.<sup>161</sup>

Like the Imperial War Museum, Holocaust Memorial Day has attempted to make the Holocaust relevant to British history by highlighting the migration of Holocaust survivors and refugees to Britain, Britain's involvement in the Second World War and the liberation of Belsen by British soldiers. This self-congratulatory approach is entirely uncritical of Britain's own history and represents a missed opportunity for Britain to engage with Holocaust memory in more self-reflective way. Again, Bloxham noted perceptively that, 'in terms of actual perpetrator agency, the British linkage with mass atrocity and death is much more direct in the record of interference, settlement and exploitation in north America, Africa, Australasia and the Indian subcontinent'.<sup>162</sup> He suggested that a Memorial Day addressing slavery would have been a more appropriate and 'a more self-critical use of history for today in Britain'.<sup>163</sup> He claimed that the approach of Holocaust Memorial Day prevents

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<sup>160</sup> Bloxham, "Britain's holocaust memorial days", 58.

<sup>161</sup> Knutsen, 'Strategic silence', 135.

<sup>162</sup> Bloxham, "Britain's holocaust memorial days", 42.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 59.

'any of the meaningful, genuinely universal but potentially divisive questions about the role of the state or of individual perpetrators being addressed'.<sup>164</sup>

As we will see in the next chapter, the history of slavery is recurrently considered not to be a 'useful' past for reinforcing a positive British national identity and so has been largely neglected in public memory in favour of the Holocaust. Ultimately, the role of Holocaust Memorial Day has been to reinforce a positive British national identity through the use of Nazi Germany as a form of negative definition to communicate favourable 'British values' to the public.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Three

### The Heart of British Values: The Victoria Tower Gardens

#### Holocaust Memorial

This final chapter investigates the recent controversy surrounding the proposed Victoria Tower Gardens Holocaust Memorial in order to illuminate how the British government has used Holocaust memory as a way to reinforce a positive British national identity. The nature of the memorial's design and the choice of its location in central London has raised key issues about the interaction of memory and public space, namely what memories are deemed acceptable in certain spaces and how this has played into the national agenda of the British government. The development of this new memorial contrasts significantly to the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial in 1983, demonstrating the substantial developments that have occurred since in Britain's Holocaust consciousness. As we saw in the previous chapter, the themes reflected in the rhetoric around the new memorial, such as the incorporation of Holocaust memory into British War memory, can be seen as a continuation of the approach established in the early 2000s by the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition and Holocaust Memorial Day. However, a new dimension of British Holocaust consciousness has emerged since the 2010s whereby Holocaust memory has become representative of 'British values'. The new Britain centric messaging surrounding the memorial reflects a shift in British politics away from a collective European identity to an independent British identity. The use of Holocaust memory



in particular to create this identity has been convenient for the British state because it enables them to write a redemptive narrative into Britain's history while ignoring Britain's own history of violence.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, Holocaust Memorial Day, the British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a national Holocaust memorial would be built in central London.<sup>165</sup> This had been one of the four key recommendations to come out of the Prime Minister's Commission Report entitled 'Britain's Promise to Remember'.<sup>166</sup> The commission had been established by Cameron on Holocaust Memorial Day a year earlier, the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2014, to find ways in which the United Kingdom could do more to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and ensure that future generations would have access to the resources to learn the 'lessons' of the Holocaust.<sup>167</sup> In order to achieve this, the commission's report made four key recommendations: a new national holocaust memorial, a learning centre, an endowment fund for Holocaust education, and the recording of British Holocaust survivor and liberator testimonies.<sup>168</sup> So far steps have only been taken to enact the first recommendation of a Holocaust memorial, which has, over time, become amalgamated with the learning centre. The public's initial reaction to the proposal of

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<sup>165</sup> "Press release: Prime Minister pledges prominent Holocaust Memorial for Britain", UK Government, 27 January 2015. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-prominent-holocaust-memorial-for-britain>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

<sup>166</sup> "Britain's Promise to Remember: The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report", Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission, 27 January 2015. <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/398645/Holocaust\\_Commission\\_Report\\_Britains\\_promise\\_to\\_remember.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398645/Holocaust_Commission_Report_Britains_promise_to_remember.pdf)>. Accessed 1 March 2021.

<sup>167</sup> "Speech: David Cameron's Holocaust Commission speech", UK Government, 27 January 2014. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/david-camersons-holocaust-commission-speech>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

<sup>168</sup> "Britain's Promise to Remember".

a Holocaust memorial and learning centre in central London had been largely positive. The Holocaust commission had represented the most significant development in the institutionalisation of British Holocaust memory since the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day.

However, a heated controversy has arisen over the location of the site and the design of the memorial.<sup>169</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 Cameron announced that the location of the memorial would be the Victoria Tower Gardens in London.<sup>170</sup> The gardens are directly adjacent to the Victoria Tower, the south-western corner of the Palace of Westminster, and along the north bank of the River Thames. It is a highly used and iconic location in London. The decision to place the new memorial there has prompted criticism by the local community, journalists, historians, and sections of the Jewish community, among others. The key concerns that these groups have with the location and design of the memorial is the destruction it would cause to the green space of the park, which is highly valued by the community, the disproportionate size of the memorial compared to the other existing memorials in the park, and the risk of terrorism at the site.<sup>171</sup> These concerns led the Westminster Council to reject the planning permission for the memorial on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February

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<sup>169</sup> Daniel Adamson, "Plans for UK Holocaust Memorial looked promising, but now debate has stalled", *The Conversation*, 30 October 2020. <<https://theconversation.com/plans-for-uk-holocaust-memorial-looked-promising-but-now-debate-has-stalled-148289>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>170</sup> "Press Release: PM, Holocaust Memorial Will Stand Beside Parliament as Permanent Statement of our British Values.", UK Government, 27 January 2016. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-holocaust-memorial-will-stand-beside-parliament-as-permanent-statement-of-our-british-values>>. Accessed 1 March 2021.

<sup>171</sup> Barbara Weiss, "The Holocaust Memorial public inquiry was a costly and unmissable spectacle", *The Architects Journal*, 27 November 2020. <<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/opinion/the-holocaust-memorial-public-inquiry-was-a-costly-yet-unmissable-spectacle>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

2020.<sup>172</sup> However, the British government had already overruled their decision on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 by ‘calling in’ the plans for the memorial.<sup>173</sup> This took the decision out of the local council’s hands and into the Housing Minister Esther McVey’s at the national level.<sup>174</sup> A public inquiry was held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 to make the final decision.<sup>175</sup> In this inquiry the historian David Gerhold demonstrated that the justifications given by the government for the memorial’s location fall apart under scrutiny.<sup>176</sup> In spite of this, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2021 the inquiry decided to approve the memorial’s planning permission and allow it to be built in the Victoria Tower Gardens.

For the purpose of this chapter, what is significant about this controversy is what it tells us about the current state of Holocaust consciousness in the Britain. The memorial itself is important because it is the first entirely government organised and funded memorial for the Holocaust in Britain. The recommendation for a national Holocaust memorial was made without any substantial campaign from the Jewish community to do so. This differed significantly from the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial which was organised and funded solely by members of the Jewish

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<sup>172</sup> Harriet Sherwood, “Westminster council opposes plan to build Holocaust memorial”, *The Guardian*, 12 February 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/11/westminster-council-opposes-plan-to-build-holocaust-memorial>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>173</sup> Ella Jessel, “Holocaust Memorial protestors furious over ‘undemocratic power grab’”, *The Architects Journal*, 6 November 2019. <<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/holocaust-memorial-protestors-furious-over-undemocratic-power-grab>>. Accessed 20 July 2021.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “Holocaust Memorial inquiry information.” City of Westminster, 27 January 2021. <<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/planning-building-and-environmental-regulations/find-appeal-or-comment-planning-application/holocaust-memorial-inquiry-information/public-inquiry-and-application-details>>. Accessed 30 June 2021.

<sup>176</sup> “CD 10.25 Dr Gerhold”, City of Westminster, 27 January 2021. <[https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cd\\_10.25\\_d\\_gerhold\\_vtg\\_statement\\_of\\_case\\_consolidated\\_6\\_oct.docx](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cd_10.25_d_gerhold_vtg_statement_of_case_consolidated_6_oct.docx)>. Accessed 30 March 2021.

community and the Board of Deputies. Yet, there was still significant consultation with the Jewish community during the government's Holocaust commission. This included the commission holding one of Britain's largest ever gatherings of Holocaust survivors at Wembley Stadium on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May in 2014.<sup>177</sup> The input of such a large amount of Holocaust survivors contrasted drastically to both the developments of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial and the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, in which Holocaust survivors were not included at all. Many of the members of the commission were themselves a part of the Jewish community as well. Furthermore, the Prime Minister's 2015 Commission Report claimed that it received nearly 2500 responses from the British community to their call for evidence on what further measures should be done to 'ensure Britain has a permanent memorial to the Holocaust and future educational resources'.<sup>178</sup> It was from this extensive consultation with the Jewish, and non-Jewish, communities in Britain that the commission concluded there was a 'widespread dissatisfaction with the existing Holocaust memorial in Hyde Park, which was felt to be hidden out of sight and offer no context, information or opportunity to learn more. The strength of feeling on this was very clear, particularly from many of Britain's Holocaust Survivors'.<sup>179</sup> The location and design of the new Holocaust memorial can therefore be seen, at least in part, as a response to perceived flaws of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial.

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<sup>177</sup> Marcus Dysch, "Holocaust Commission event is a day to remember", *The Jewish Chronicle*, 8 May 2014. <<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/holocaust-commission-event-is-a-day-to-remember-1.54543>>. Accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>178</sup> "Policy Paper: Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report", UK Government, 27 January 2015. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prime-ministers-holocaust-commission-report>>. Accessed 1 March 2021.

<sup>179</sup> "Britain's Promise to Remember".

The government's Holocaust commission demonstrated that there had been a clear shift in the acceptability of Holocaust commemorations in Britain. It had shifted from the responsibility of the Jewish community in the 1970s to being a part of official government policy. As a consequence, this shift has led to Holocaust commemorations becoming top-down initiatives embedded with national level agendas. This had been one of the key concerns of historians in the early 2000s in regard to the state-controlled Holocaust Memorial Day. The national agenda of the memorial was made apparent when the national government overruled the local government's authority over its own council area to ensure that it was built in the location that they had chosen. Thus, even though there had been substantial consultation with the Jewish community in the initial Holocaust commission, this memorial nevertheless needs to be viewed as a top-down government initiative with concerns at a national and international level.

The priorities and politics of Britain's national government are reflected in their messaging around the memorial. An important document that especially showcases the ideology behind the new Holocaust memorial is the Prime Minister's 2015 Commission Report. The report attempted to frame Britain's history with the Holocaust as a redemptive narrative. This is a common theme in Holocaust commemorations, most famously at Yad Vashem in Israel.<sup>180</sup> Redemptive narratives frame the events of the Holocaust as a story of triumph over adversity or

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<sup>180</sup> Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (Rutgers University Press, 2014), 74.

perseverance through tragedy. However, usually the ‘victors’ are the victims of the Holocaust where their ‘triumph’ was to have survived the Holocaust and resisted the extermination of the Jewish people.<sup>181</sup> This form of Holocaust memory has received criticism from historians and Holocaust survivors for attempting to add ‘meaning’ to the Holocaust or simplify its complexity.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, it is a common method for Holocaust commemorations to portray the narrative of Holocaust. It is less common however, for the ‘victors’ of the Holocaust to be framed as the non-Jewish British soldiers of the Second World War.

The report stated that Britain’s relationship with the Holocaust ‘is largely a positive story of resilience and rebuilding’.<sup>183</sup> In its introduction there was an emphasis on how Britain ‘proudly stood up to Hitler’ and homed thousands of Jewish refugees.<sup>184</sup> Here Britain’s identity is cast into two interconnected roles, that of the ‘saviours’ of the Jews and the ‘heroes’ of the Second World War. Conveniently, the report positioned Britain’s history with the Holocaust ‘through the eyes of survivors, refugees or children who arrived on the ‘Kindertransport’, who have rebuilt their lives in the UK’.<sup>185</sup> However, the perspective of the thousands of Jews who were refused entry into Britain and as a result died in the concentration camps is absent. As Holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who moved to Britain after the war, has pointed out, although tens of thousands of children were allowed into Britain at

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<sup>181</sup> Lawrence Langer, *The Afterdeath of the Holocaust* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 39.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>183</sup> “Britain’s Promise to Remember”.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

Kindertransport, 'what about their parents?'.<sup>186</sup> She recalled that 'Her own father...vainly pleaded with British bureaucracy for admission before the war. In 1942, he and her mother were taken away from their home in Breslau... and she never saw them again.'<sup>187</sup> Thus, she, among many, are 'sceptical' about what is really meant by the memorial's theme of 'British values'.<sup>188</sup>

According to the report, 'Ensuring that the memory and the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten lies at the heart of Britain's values as a nation'.<sup>189</sup> Yet, the report only briefly acknowledged Britain's own negative history with the Holocaust before quickly glossing over it. Instead of engaging with the complexity of Britain's history the report used the fact that Britain accepted a number of refugees and fought alone against Germany as a form of moral capital which absolved them of any wrongdoing. While it is correct that Britain did save thousands of lives by accepting refugees and that they did fight valiantly against Germany alone, these are not reasons to be completely uncritical of Britain's actions during the Holocaust. In a letter to the memorial's planning inquiry, a group of British academics argued that the new memorial would portray Britain as the 'ultimate saviour of the Jews'.<sup>190</sup>

While the report claimed that in response to these issues 'Britain reflects on its

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<sup>186</sup> Rowan Moore. "Holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch: 'No memorial can come anywhere near what happened'", *The Guardian*, 27 December 2020.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/dec/27/holocaust-survivor-anita-lasker-wallfisch-uk-holocaust-memorial-learning-centre>>. Accessed 29 March 2021.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> "Britain's Promise to Remember".

<sup>190</sup> Greg Pitcher, "Holocaust Memorial would 'add to myth' of Britain's role say professors as inquiry opens", *The Architects Journal*, 6 October 2020.

<<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/holocaust-memorial-would-add-to-myth-of-britains-role>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

responsibilities in the world today', no attempt is made to clarify what this means.<sup>191</sup> This could have been an opportunity for Britain to take responsibility or express regret for their lack of intervention in the Holocaust and the rise of interwar anti-Semitism but that notion is never discussed. As we saw in the previous chapter when discussing Holocaust Memorial Day, official British Holocaust memory is only comfortable with portraying Britain as the antithesis of Nazi Germany, rather than examining their similarities. Thus, the purpose of the Holocaust commission, and the new memorial, was not to inspire any critical self-reflection of Britain's history with the Holocaust but to simply reinforce a positive national identity.

In order to fully understand this development in the ideology of British Holocaust commemoration it is necessary to understand the political climate surrounding the creation of the memorial. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2014, David Cameron reaffirmed his commitment to legislate a 'British Bill of Rights'.<sup>192</sup> At this point the Holocaust commission had been well underway, having been established in January of that year. The bill was an initiative that Cameron had been promising his party since 2006.<sup>193</sup> Cameron's proposal of a 'British Bill of Rights' would mean that Britain would have its own bill of rights separate from the European Court of Human Rights. As Professor Francesca Klug argued in 2014, '...whether or not the UK formally withdraws from the ECHR in the future, Cameron is clearly signalling that his so-called British Bill of Rights is aimed at exempting Britain from judgments of

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<sup>191</sup> "Britain's Promise to Remember".

<sup>192</sup> Oliver Wright, "David Cameron to 'scrap' Human Rights Act for new 'British Bill of Rights'", *The Independent*, 1 October 2014. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/conservative-party-conference-cameron-announces-plans-scrap-human-rights-act-9767435.html>>. Accessed 20 July 2021.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.



the European human rights court that have not found favour with the government'.<sup>194</sup> The memorial was thus being conceptualised at a time in which the British government was dissatisfied with its relationship with the European Union and Cameron was attempting to distance Britain from Europe.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2015, six months after the Holocaust commission report was published, David Cameron publicly announced his 'British Bill of Rights'.<sup>195</sup> He chose the celebration of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta to announce it.<sup>196</sup> Significantly, in this announcement Cameron used British history in order to validate his political agenda. He claimed that by discarding the Human Rights Act and replacing it with this 'British Bill of Rights', severing Britain's link with the European Court of Human Rights, they would be safeguarding the 'legacy' of the Magna Carta.<sup>197</sup> He emphasised Britain's individual national identity by recalling that 'This is the country that wrote the Magna Carta, the country that time and again has stood up for human rights, whether liberating Europe from fascism or leading the charge today against sexual violence in war'.<sup>198</sup> These examples are used by Cameron to set Britain apart from Europe, and the rest of the world, and construct a narrative of Britain's supposed history of human rights advocacy. This

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<sup>194</sup> Francesca Klug, "With his promise to introduce a British Bill of Rights, David Cameron is really aiming at the ECHR", *The London School of Economic and Political Science*, 1 October 2015.

<<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/with-his-promise-to-introduce-a-british-bill-of-rights-david-cameron-is-really-aiming-at-the-echr/>>. Accessed 29 March 2021.

<sup>195</sup> Patrick Wintour, "David Cameron: British bill of rights will 'safeguard legacy' of Magna Carta", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2015/jun/15/david-cameron-british-bill-of-rights-safeguard-legacy-magna-carta>>. Accessed 29 March 2021.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Matthew Weaver, "Cameron condemned for 'using Magna Carta day to push British bill of rights'", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/15/david-cameron-magna-carta-push-british-bill-of-rights-claim>>. Accessed 18 June 2021.

<sup>198</sup> Wright, "David Cameron".

approach is strikingly similar to that of the Holocaust commission report. In both cases there is an emphasis on 'British values', which change depending on the situation, and narratives of Britain's history being utilised to construct a national identity.

The major theme here, which was more obvious in this case but is equally apparent in the new memorial, is the separation of Britain from Europe. Traditionally Holocaust commemorations have emphasised themes of universal humanism and shared European identity.<sup>199</sup> This is due to recent historical interpretations that the origins of contemporary human rights arose from the Holocaust and the Second World War.<sup>200</sup> In fact, the drafters of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations made no mention of the Holocaust.<sup>201</sup> Yet this myth that the Holocaust was the ethical foundation of the European post-war human rights system remains. It was actually British Conservatives who had originally advocated for a European Court of Human Rights. At the Congress of Europe in 1948 Winston Churchill had endorsed a 'Charter of Human Rights' which transcended national boundaries and 'consecrated the defense of human rights as the lodestar of the European project'. Britain had embraced this 'European project', not because they wanted to be a part of one economic union but because they saw

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<sup>199</sup> David Tollerton, "The role of sacrality in British state-supported Holocaust remembrance", *The London School of Economic and Political Science*, 25 June 2020. <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/sacrality-british-holocaust-remembrance/>>. Accessed 29 March 2021.

<sup>200</sup> Marco Duranti, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 392.

<sup>201</sup> Marco Duranti, "The Holocaust, the Legacy of 1789 and the Birth of International Human Rights Law: Revisiting the Foundation Myth," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (June 2012), 180.

the European Union as a bastion against dictatorships.<sup>202</sup> In doing so, they projected their ideology of British nationalism onto ‘European values’. As Marco Duranti has argued, Churchill’s self-presentation as a ‘Good European’ justified ‘a prominent British role in shaping the European project, all the while equivocating on the question of whether Britain would eventually join a formal economic or political union’.<sup>203</sup> This suggests that the memorial marks a rupture between Churchill’s vision of Britain as part of a ‘European community of values’ and a later generation of Conservatives’ agenda to definitively distance Britain from the European human rights regime. Cameron’s messaging on the ‘British Bill of Rights’ and the plans for the Victorian Tower Gardens memorial reflected a similar political discourse in this regard.



The Victoria Tower Gardens<sup>204</sup>

The influence of this political moment extended not just to the ideology of the memorial but also the choice of its highly controversial location. David Cameron

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<sup>202</sup> Duranti, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution*, 352.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 357.

<sup>204</sup> “Victoria Tower Gardens”. Gardenvisit.

<[https://www.gardenvisit.com/gardens/victoria\\_tower\\_gardens\\_westminster](https://www.gardenvisit.com/gardens/victoria_tower_gardens_westminster)>. Accessed 25 October 2021.

announced the location of the memorial on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2016, six months before the United Kingdom's referendum on whether to leave or remain in the European Union.<sup>205</sup> In the announcement Cameron stated that "Today I can tell the House this memorial will be built in Victoria Tower Gardens. It will stand beside Parliament as a permanent statement of our values as a nation and will be something for our children to visit for generations to come".<sup>206</sup> The emphasis on the symbolic significance of the location next to parliament, the 'heart' of the nation and their democracy, was repeated by Cameron and numerous other politicians in their official announcements. Labour MP Ed Balls stated that 'It's so important that when children come to Parliament and learn about the history of our great democracy and all that we stand for as a nation, they will also be able to learn about and remember what happened when racism, antisemitism and hatred was left unchecked and allowed to flourish'.<sup>207</sup> His comments foreshadowed a major theme of the future design of the memorial, which would be dependent on the location of the Victoria Tower Gardens. This was the positioning of Britain as a positive counter example to Nazi Germany. Rather than learn from Britain's own history with antisemitism and racism, the focus was on the crimes of other nations and ultimate heroism of Britain. This was yet another example of 'adversarial silence', mentioned in the previous chapter, being utilised in Britain as a method of legitimising the state.<sup>208</sup> The fact that the location of the memorial in the iconic Victoria Tower Gardens is located across from the symbolic Palace of Westminster is key to this messaging. Thus, even

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<sup>205</sup> "Press Release: PM, Holocaust Memorial Will Stand Beside Parliament as Permanent Statement of our British Values."

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Knutsen, 'Strategic silence', 135.

though the Holocaust was an event that largely took place in Eastern Europe, the memorial is able to construct a Holocaust memory that focuses on British identity and history separate from the rest of Europe.

The fact that the national government had overruled the local council's decision to reject the location showcased that the government had a vested interest in supporting this 'British' focused messaging and brings to the forefront an important mystery at the centre of this controversy, which is how the location for the memorial was initially chosen. In the Holocaust commission report, where the memorial was first recommended, it did not suggest the Victoria Tower Gardens as a possible site.<sup>209</sup> The Holocaust Memorial Foundation was established on 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, the day the commission report was published, to find a suitable site for the memorial.<sup>210</sup> The foundation announced their decision a year later and claimed that Victoria Tower Gardens was chosen 'because the location, in the shadow of Parliament, will encourage visitors to learn about the challenging decisions our Government had to make in the lead up to, during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust'.<sup>211</sup> However, in his submission to the Planning Inquiry Gerhold demonstrated that the process had been flawed and 'utterly opaque'.<sup>212</sup> As he stated, 'What we don't know is who took the crucial decisions, when they took them and

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<sup>209</sup> "Britain's Promise to Remember".

<sup>210</sup> "Speech: National Holocaust Commemoration event 2015: Prime Minister's speech", UK Government, 27 January 2015. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/national-holocaust-commemoration-event-2015-prime-ministers-speech>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

<sup>211</sup> "UK Holocaust Memorial Public Exhibition Boards December 2018", United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation, December 2018. <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/761583/UK\\_Holocaust\\_Memorial\\_public\\_exhibition\\_boards\\_December\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761583/UK_Holocaust_Memorial_public_exhibition_boards_December_2018.pdf)>. Accessed 15 July 2021.

<sup>212</sup> "CD 10.25 Dr Gerhold".

what the reasons were for scaling down the Learning Centre so drastically. In other words, we cannot be sure what the real reasons were for the choice of Victoria Tower Gardens.<sup>213</sup> The site was certainly not chosen for its suitability because the Victoria Tower Gardens does not fulfill the commission report's criteria for a memorial and learning centre. For instance, the learning centre was never intended to be on the same site as the memorial. It was to be located in a building nearby the memorial and large enough to be 'the heart of a campus driving a network of national educational activity'.<sup>214</sup> The planned design for the learning centre will not be able to do this because of its limited space and inaccessibility of the site due to the lack of parking nearby. Gerhold has argued therefore, that choice of the Victoria Tower Gardens was predetermined and made outside the official site finding process because the site was free, available for the government to use, and an 'iconic' big statement location.<sup>215</sup>

While all these factors definitely had a significant influence on the decision, there is more to unpack about the need for an 'iconic' location. The key force behind the scenes that had been pushing for the site had been Cameron himself. Gerhold mentioned a letter written by Lord Feldman of Elstree, a member of The Holocaust Memorial Foundation and the Conservative Party Chairman, to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2015.<sup>216</sup> Lord Feldman, Gerhold pointed out, 'has been described in the Financial Times as 'David

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> 'Britain's Promise'.

<sup>215</sup> "CD 10.25 Dr Gerhold".

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

Cameron's oldest political friend".<sup>217</sup> In this letter Feldman suggested that the memorial could be in Victoria Tower Gardens and the Learning Centre 'close by' in Millbank.<sup>218</sup> Feldman claimed that, 'The Prime Minister is aware of this proposal, and he suggested that I write to you to seek out your views on this issue'.<sup>219</sup> In light of this, it is even more significant that Cameron has said on different occasions that his inspiration for the memorial was based on the Holocaust memorials in Berlin and Israel.<sup>220</sup> Both these memorials are in iconic locations, one near the German parliament building and the other with a view of Jerusalem. We can thus conclude that the choice of the Victoria Tower Gardens was not made based on the suitability of the site, but instead was chosen by Cameron to further his political agenda to have a national Holocaust memorial that reinforced a national identity, as had been done in other countries.

This controversy around the memorial's location brings to the forefront key issues about the interaction between memory and public space. We can see a trend in which memories are deemed acceptable for certain spaces. Several of the locations that were turned down for the new Holocaust memorial had also been turned down for the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial. For example, Whitehall was considered and then rejected both times. As discussed in the first chapter, Whitehall is located near the Cenotaph, a First World War memorial which has been a highly significant memorial for British war memory. As Steven Cooke stated, 'The Whitehall Cenotaph

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Letter from Lord Feldman to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 26 October 2015 quoted in Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Tollerton, "The role of sacrality in British state-supported Holocaust remembrance".

has long been recognized as one of the defining mnemonic sites of British war memory'.<sup>221</sup> The placement of a Holocaust memorial at Whitehall on both occasions was rejected because it was deemed that Holocaust memory would be encroaching on this already sacred space.<sup>222</sup> But the Victoria Tower Gardens, like Hyde Park, did not have this memory associated with it and so it was free to be used for Holocaust memory.

Importantly however, the Victoria Tower Gardens is close enough to the iconic Westminster Palace to have an influence on British identity, without overstepping into World War One memory. It is a much more public and open space than the Hyde Park location. The design of the memorial is also bigger and meant to actively 'disrupt' the park, rather than 'blend in' to the park like the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial was intended to. It certainly shows a shift in Holocaust memory becoming more accepted in public spaces, but it also demonstrates the limits of the integration of British War memory with Holocaust memory. Ultimately British War memory continues to be the priority. In theory the location of the memorial would seemingly address the 'dissatisfaction' the commission report found with the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial and signify the increase in acceptability of Holocaust commemoration in public consciousness. However, the memorial's design, in conjunction with its location, has created several concerns for the local community and showcased the politicisation of British Holocaust commemorations.

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<sup>221</sup> Steven Cooke, "Negotiating memory and identity: the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, London", *Journal of historical geography*, 26, no. 3 (2000): 456.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 457.





The Holocaust Memorial<sup>223</sup>

The main criticisms that the public have with the memorial's location centre around the destruction and disruption that the memorial's design would cause to the gardens. The majority of newspaper articles that have discussed the memorial do not mention any issue with *having* a Holocaust memorial, in fact most have been eager to say that they agree with the concept of a Holocaust memorial. Their concerns are with its proposed size and location.<sup>224</sup> The design chosen for the memorial would make it much larger than the other three pre-existing memorials in the park and the construction of the underground learning centre would cause significant damage to the gardens. It would also rob the local community of a large green space which is prized in central London. Rowan Moore in *The Guardian* argued that the memorial should be smaller to fit in with the other memorials in the gardens and should not have the learning centre underneath it.<sup>225</sup> Others have argued that the memorial

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<sup>223</sup> "Save Victoria Tower Gardens: Prevent Building in this Precious London Park". Save Victoria Tower Gardens. <<https://www.savevictoriatowergardens.co.uk>>. Accessed 25 October 2021.

<sup>224</sup> Rowan Moore, "UK Holocaust memorial – time for a rethink", *The Guardian*, 10 February 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/feb/09/uk-holocaust-memorial-london-david-adjaye-ron-arad-time-for-a-rethink>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

would be more appropriate at another location such as the Imperial War Museum, which had been one of the three original sites suggested by the Holocaust Commission.

The concerns about the environmental impact and damage that the memorial's construction would cause to the surrounding heritage sites has inspired the local community to establish the Save Victoria Tower Gardens campaign. This campaign has stated that it wants to prevent 'the use of a much loved and well-used local park [being turned] into a sombre, security patrolled civic space'.<sup>226</sup> They have argued that the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition is only half a mile away from the proposed site and the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial less than 2 miles away.<sup>227</sup> For them, the memorial is unnecessary, especially when considering the significant loss of space that it would cause in the gardens. When the Westminster Council opposed the plans for the memorial, they cited concerns over the loss of 'one of the few remaining green spaces next to the River Thames in central London'.<sup>228</sup> The council's Chair of Planning stated that 'If it were Westminster city council taking a decision on the application, it would have been refused on heritage grounds; the location in Victoria Tower Gardens, its size and design would cause considerable harm and would have a significant, detrimental impact on one of the few remaining green spaces on the Thames Embankment'.<sup>229</sup> In the following public inquiry, it was

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<sup>226</sup> "Home", Save Victoria Tower Gardens. <<https://www.savevictoriatowergardens.co.uk/>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>227</sup> "About the Campaign", Save Victoria Tower Gardens. <<https://www.savevictoriatowergardens.co.uk/the-campaign>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>228</sup> Harriet Sherwood, "Westminster council opposes plan to build Holocaust memorial", *The Guardian*, 12 February 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/11/westminster-council-opposes-plan-to-build-holocaust-memorial>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

warned that the site posed a terrorism risk and a cabinet minister revealed that he had received death threats due to his involvement with the memorial.<sup>230</sup> Even though the majority of submissions to the inquiry appeared to be against the location of the memorial, planning permission was still approved by the national government.



The Holocaust Memorial's entrance<sup>231</sup>

Aside from the practical concerns with the memorial's design, there are also thematic and ideological issues with it too. The memorial's design was created by British architect David Adjaye and Israeli architect Ron Arad. They won the international design competition for the memorial and learning centre launched by Prime Minister Theresa May on 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2016.<sup>232</sup> By this point David

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<sup>230</sup> Harriet Sherwood, "Robert Jenrick 'subject to death threats' over Holocaust memorial", *The Guardian*, 6 October 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/06/robert-jenrick-subject-to-death-threats-over-holocaust-memorial>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>231</sup> "Winner Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects". Malcolm Reading Consultants. <<https://competitions.malcolmreading.com/holocaustmemorial/shortlist/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architects>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>232</sup> "Press release: International design competition opens for new UK Holocaust memorial beside Parliament", UK Government, 14 September 2016. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-design-competition-opens-for-new-uk-holocaust-memorial-beside-parliament>>. Accessed 14 July 2021.

Cameron was no longer the Prime Minister, but the Conservative party was still in government, and the Brexit Referendum had resulted in the British government beginning the process of leaving the European Union. The design consists of 23 tall bronze fins which sit in a large concrete courtyard and lead into an underground learning centre. In the official announcement of the winning design, it states that ‘The design concept takes visitors on a journey that culminates in confronting the 23 tall bronze fins of the Memorial, the spaces in between representing the 22 countries in which Jewish communities were destroyed during the Holocaust’.<sup>233</sup> A major complaint with the design has been that Adjaye and Arad had already submitted a version of it to a Canadian design competition for their own Holocaust memorial, and it had been rejected.<sup>234</sup> The idea that the design had originally been created for an entirely different country went against the idea that the memorial represented *British* history.

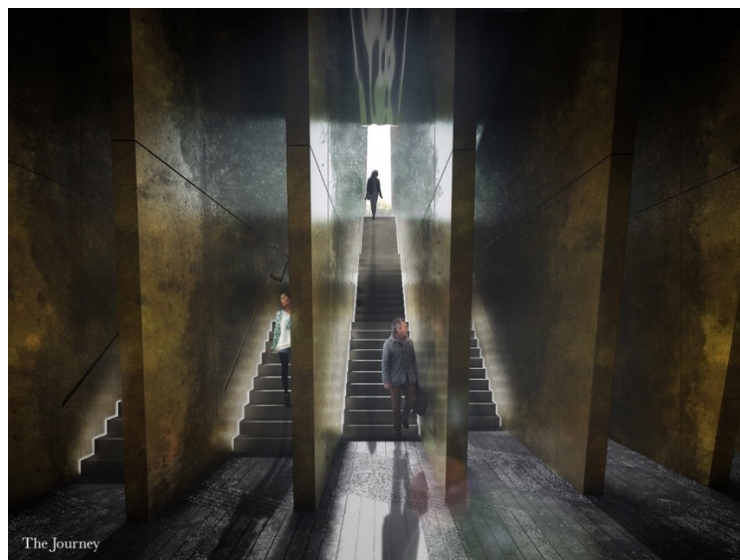
Furthermore, the gaps between the fins represent the countries that experienced the Holocaust and notably Britain is not one of them. The framing of these fins is an important part of the redemptive negative epiphany that is created by the memorial’s location. In the announcement it states that ‘Entering the memorial would be a sensory experience. While the outside and inside space emphasises collective gathering, the 23 bronze fins require the visitor to enter in an isolated, solitary way, each pathway planned as a different experience. Each path eventually

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<sup>233</sup> “Press release: Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects win UK Holocaust Memorial International Design Competition”, UK Government, 24 October 2017. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architexts-win-uk-holocaust-memorial-international-design-competition>>. Accessed 8 March 2021.

<sup>234</sup> David Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory and Britain’s Religious-Secular Landscape: Politics, Sacrality, and Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 145.

leads down into the Threshold – a generous hall which acts as a place of contemplation and transition into the Learning Centre below ground... On leaving the memorial, the circulation route ensures visitors will emerge to see the classic uninterrupted view of Parliament – and the reality of democracy'.<sup>235</sup> In other words, the visitor descends from Victoria Tower Gardens into a dark underground hellscape where they are shown the horrors of the Holocaust and then they rise back into the real world with the reassurance that they are in the Britain, 'the reality of democracy'. This type of negative epiphany has been used in other Holocaust commemorations, most notably Yad Vashem in Israel which comes out to a view of Jerusalem.<sup>236</sup> However, it is especially concerning for Britain because it glosses over both Britain's history with human rights abuses and the issues that are still occurring today. As a result, Britain comes across as a 'democratic utopia' compared to the rest of Europe and the world.



The entrance to the Learning Centre<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> "Press release: Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects".

<sup>236</sup> Tollerton, *Holocaust Memory and Britain's Religious-Secular Landscape*, 130.

<sup>237</sup> "Winner Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects". Malcolm Reading Consultants. <<https://competitions.malcolmreading.com/holocaustmemorial/shortlist/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architects>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

One of the architects Adjaye has tried to claim that it is appropriate for the Holocaust memorial to be placed in the Victoria Tower Gardens because it is a 'park of Britain's conscience'.<sup>238</sup> This is because of the other three memorials that already exist in the park, the statue of Emmeline Pankhurst, the Burghers of Calais, and the Buxton Memorial. According to Adjaye, they all recognise 'injustice and the need to oppose it'.<sup>239</sup> However, on another occasion, in defence of the design, he argued that 'Disrupting the pleasure of being in a park is key to the thinking' behind the memorial.<sup>240</sup> Thus, there is a contradiction about whether the memorial is meant to fit into the park or purposely disrupt it. The latter is clearly a response to the emphasis there had been on the Hyde Park Memorial 'blending into the park' and a defence of the size of the memorial.

There are several issues with this concept of the 'park of conscience'. Firstly, the fact that the memorial is so much bigger than the other monuments in the Victoria Tower Gardens implies a sense of greater importance. Secondly, it has an underground learning centre which none of the other memorials have. It cannot be coincidental that the monuments to slavery and sexism, which Britain played a significant part in perpetrating, are downplayed in comparison to the Holocaust memorial, which Britain gets to credit itself 'liberating'. The scale and inclusion of the learning centre compared with the other memorials says, intentionally or not, that the Holocaust is

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<sup>238</sup> "Press release: Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects".

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ella Jessel, "David Adjaye says 'disrupting' the park is key to his Holocaust memorial thinking", *Architects Journal*, 5 February 2019. <<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/david-adjaye-says-disrupting-the-park-is-key-to-his-holocaust-memorial-thinking>>. Accessed 20 July 2021.



the ‘greatest evil’ that has ever occurred. It supports a narrative of British history that focuses on them as saviours and victors of the war against an evil Germany while pushing aside the narratives of their own crimes of a similar scale during their colonial rule and involvement in the slave trade.



A sculpture of Memorial 2007<sup>241</sup>

At the memorial’s planning inquiry a group of British academics pointed out that in 2005 a proposed slave memorial to supplement the Buxton memorial, which was planned to be much smaller than the proposed Holocaust memorial, was turned down because it was deemed that there was not enough space in the Victoria Tower Gardens for any more memorials.<sup>242</sup> The Royal Parks offered instead the location of Hyde Park, where the previous Holocaust Memorial had been placed.<sup>243</sup> Despite a

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<sup>241</sup> “The Sculpture”. Memorial 2007. <<http://www.memorial2007.org.uk/the-sculpture>>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>242</sup> “Planning Inquiry regarding the placement of the National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens”, German Studies Archives, 24 September 2020. <<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A2=GERMAN-STUDIES;7300f47b.2009>>. Accessed 1 June 2021.

<sup>243</sup> Afua Hirsch, “Britain was built on the backs of slaves. A memorial is the least they deserve”, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/23/memorial-2007-enslaved-africans-black-history-britain>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

dedicated campaign by Memorial 2007 to erect this memorial to the slaves it has never gained support or funding from the government.<sup>244</sup> The Holocaust memorial in contrast has received millions of dollars of funding. Afua Hirsch pointed out in *The Guardian* in 2019 that 'Memorial 2007 has tried repeatedly to secure that support, having reached out to every Prime Minister from Tony Blair to Boris Johnson. The announcement in 2015 of £50m in support for a Holocaust memorial raised the group's hopes. It suggested that there was a renewed interest in remembering painful historic events. But that interest, it seems, does not extend to black Britons'.<sup>245</sup>

As we saw in the previous chapter, the concern that Holocaust memory was being prioritised over the memory of British slavery had been voiced by historian Donald Bloxham as early as 2002. In his criticism of Holocaust Memorial Day, he had suggested that it would be more appropriate and 'a more self-critical use of history' for Britain to have a Memorial Day for slavery.<sup>246</sup> Holocaust memorialisation has continually been valued more highly by the British government than the memorialisation of slavery. The historian David Olusoga pointed out in 2015 in *The Guardian* that there are numerous memorials to abolitionists such as the Buxton memorial but there has been no national monument to the slaves themselves.<sup>247</sup> In his own words, 'The slaves have not been cast in bronze but cast into obscurity; their

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<sup>244</sup> Robert Booth, "UK government refuses to fund slavery memorial endorsed by Johnson in 2008", *The Guardian*, 11 December 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/10/slave-trade-memorial-charity-uk-government-refusal-of-funding-boris-johnson>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>245</sup> Hirsch, "Britain was built on the backs of slaves".

<sup>246</sup> Bloxham, "Britain's holocaust memorial days", 59.

<sup>247</sup> David Olusoga, "Why has a memorial to slaves quietly been dropped?", *The Guardian*, 4 October 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/04/slavery-memorial-london-dropped>>. Accessed 15 March 2021.



faces and their chains are reminders of a history the nation has done its best to forget'.<sup>248</sup> Thus, 'Britain's park of conscience' is actually a means of portraying the British as liberators and saviours, opposing injustice without any acknowledgment of their own roles as perpetrators. Once again, we come back to the issue of space and memory, with memorials revealing which memories are, and are not, acceptable in certain public spaces. We can see from the memorials in the Victoria Tower Gardens that the memories that are acceptable for this public space are the ones that support a positive narrative for Britain's national identity. The fact that space was suddenly available in the park for a Holocaust memorial, and not a slave memorial, showcases that Holocaust commemoration is more valuable to the government because it paints a redemptive narrative into Britain's history.

Therefore, there has been a clear shift in the acceptability of Holocaust commemorations in British public spaces, but as a consequence it has become a tool used by the Conservative government to support Britain's national identity. The official government messaging around the Victoria Tower Gardens Memorial differs significantly from the messaging around the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial. There is no longer an emphasis on this memorial 'blending in' to the park. However, looking at the political climate in which the concept for the memorial was developed, we can also see Britain's straining relationship with the European Union reflected in its ideology. In many ways, the Holocaust is being conceptualised for the British community as a story of the heroism of the British, rather than the tragedy of the Jews and the result of anti-Semitism. In fact, as we saw by its inclusion in the

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

Victoria Tower Garden, where the slave memorial had been rejected, Holocaust commemoration has become a valuable way to create a redemptive narrative in Britain's history. While the Holocaust is no longer being hidden away in public, it appears to be at the expense of the Holocaust being assimilated into British identity and used to signal generalised messages about British values, losing its specificity to the Jewish community.

## Conclusion

Britain has had a complex history with Holocaust memory that has evolved significantly over the last fifty years. There has been a transition from a general uncertainty about the place of Holocaust remembrance in public spaces to an official declaration that Holocaust remembrance lies at the 'heart of Britain's values as a nation'. The comparative approach taken by this thesis has revealed that even though international trends have been influential in this process, it has ultimately been national influences that have played a key role in shaping the development of Britain's Holocaust commemorations. Furthermore, as much as it has been important to examine what has been said in Britain's Holocaust discourse, it has also been necessary to examine the silenced that have occurred, as they have revealed how Holocaust memory has been valued by the British state more highly than other memories because of its usefulness in supporting an uncritical national identity.

In chapter one we saw the importance of the historical relationship between the state and its Jewish population in determining the character of a nation's first Holocaust commemorations. The development of the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial had been heavily influenced by the negotiations between Britain's Jewish elite and the British government which reflected the tenuous position of the Jewish community in British society. On the other hand, the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne had received no support from the Australian government and was instead entirely funded by local Holocaust survivors and the Jewish community. As a result, the museum was

unburdened by government interference and able to create a far more impactful and educational experience for its visitors than the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial.

In chapter two it was demonstrated that there was a major shift in Britain's approach to Holocaust memory in the early 2000s with the opening of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition and the initiation of Holocaust Memorial Day. Through these two developments Holocaust memory became embedded into British war memory as means of bolstering an uncritical national British identity. In contrast, due to the extensive involvement of Holocaust survivors in the creation of the Sydney Jewish Museum there was a purposeful avoidance of setting the Holocaust within any nationalistic narratives and instead a focus on portraying the experiences of the survivors. The approach established by the Imperial War Museum and Holocaust Memorial Day became the foundation for the British government to use Holocaust memory as a basis for a human rights pedagogy rather than to explore their own history with slavery or colonial violence.

In the third and final chapter we saw that this approach has culminated in the proposal of a new Holocaust memorial in the Victoria Tower Gardens in London. The development of this memorial has been fraught with controversy, particularly in relation its prominent location and design. In contrast to the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, this memorial is state sponsored and has been almost entirely disconnected from the influence of the Jewish community. The biggest shift in Britain's Holocaust consciousness has been the new rhetoric that the Holocaust memorial will demonstrate 'British values'. This is reflective of the Conservative

government's agenda to move away from inclusive universalistic language around the Holocaust to more exclusive nationalistic language. The controversy has highlighted the way that Holocaust memory has been politicised by the British government as means to reinforce a British national identity that is separate from a European identity.

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