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Holocaust Remembrance 2004 in East Renfrewshire

Liz McGettigan

Libraries and Information Services Manager
Cultural Services, East Renfrewshire Council,
Glen St, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire,
G78 1QA, UK

David McMenemy and Alan Poulter

Lecturers
Graduate School of Informatics,
Department of Computer and Information Sciences,
University of Strathclyde,
Livingstone Tower, 26 Richmond Street,
Glasgow, G1 1XH, U.K.

Abstract:

This paper discusses the implementation of a community portal and CD-ROM in East Renfrewshire Council, Scotland, aimed at commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day. The area has one of the largest Jewish populations in Scotland and with some residents being Holocaust survivors, their own testimonies were used to ensure the portal was relevant to the local community. The site, which was runner-up in the CILIP/LiS Libraries Change Lives Award, also discusses other Holocausts throughout the world, and stands as a testament to all who have suffered in such atrocities. The site has been well received by the community and reflects how local immigrant communities can contribute to resources that can inform their local community and the world.

Background to Project

As the historic second-city of the British Empire Glasgow and its surrounding area has seen much immigration in its long and successful history. Waves of immigrants

from Russia and Eastern Europe, who came to settle across the United Kingdom during the 19th century, brought thousands of Jews to Scotland, most of whom chose to make their homes in industrial Glasgow. Many of Glasgow's contemporary Jewish community have moved from the industrial parts of the city into East Renfrewshire, where many of the city's seven synagogues are located.

As part of the commitment to this ethnic diversity in the local community, the local authority decided to build a community portal to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day in 2004, for which it was also hosting a commemorative exhibition.¹ In creating this website and exhibition content was developed in line with the National Holocaust Memorial Day, which aimed to:

- Recognise that the Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th Century, a crisis for European civilisation and a universal catastrophe for humanity.
- Provide a national mark of respect for all victims of Nazi persecution and demonstrate understanding with all those who still suffer its consequences.
- Raise awareness and understanding of the events of the Holocaust as a continuing issue of fundamental importance for all humanity.
- Ensure that the horrendous crimes, racism and victimisation committed during the Holocaust are neither forgotten nor repeated, whether in Europe or elsewhere in the world.
- Restate the continuing need for vigilance in light of the troubling repetition of human tragedies in the world today.
- Reflect on recent atrocities that raise similar issues.
- Provide a national focus for educating subsequent generations about the Holocaust and the continued relevance of the lessons that are learnt from it.
- Provide an opportunity to examine our nation's past and learn for the future.
- Promote a democratic and tolerant society, free of the evils of prejudice, racism and other forms of bigotry.
- Support the Government's commitment that all citizens - without distinction - should participate freely and fully in the economic, social and public life of the nation.
- Highlight the values of a tolerant and diverse society based upon the notions of universal dignity and equal rights and responsibilities for all its citizens.
- Assert a continuing commitment to oppose racism, anti-Semitism, victimisation and genocide.

¹ The site can be accessed on: <http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/holocaust>

It was important to ensure that the broad aims for the project were in line with those of the day. The commemoration is a national annual event, and as such attempts to ensure that events all operate under the aims listed above. In this way the partnership developed could ensure that the resources created achieved the widest possible impact; satisfying national goals while also reflecting the experiences of members of the local community.

It was decided that the site would be developed with representatives from the Jewish community within East Renfrewshire and include unique audio testimonies, as well as links to a multitude of material on the Holocaust and genocide. Input was also sought from the disabled, homosexual and Romany communities to emphasise their barbaric treatment during the Holocaust, sometimes less well documented. One of the main goals for the site was to help ensure that the local community and especially young people would never forget the Holocaust and were also aware of current genocides. An accompanying CD-ROM would be created containing the same resources to help support wide dissemination of the project to schools and other community groups.

The Resources Created

The emerging web resource is built around five key sections:

- Testimonies
- Culture
- Non-Jewish victims
- Other Holocausts
- Events and resources

Building the portal under these headings was a huge undertaking, as it meant working with the community to gather resources. A vital component of the site would be the oral testimonies of members of the Jewish community in East Renfrewshire who had experienced at first hand the horrors of the Holocaust. It was felt this would bring the history to the young people in the community in a more realistic fashion. Indeed, the origins and lives of the community are well documented via the oral testimonies, offering as glimpse of reality of what it was like being a Jewish person during the Holocaust. One such testimony is from Reverend Ernest Levy, who emigrated to Scotland in 1961 and was a survivor of the concentration camps. Ernest recalls the tragedy of losing his family members in the Holocaust, yet his final hope is that the sharing of such experiences can aid the healing process:

All the while we have tried to share our first hand experiences. The first step to the healing process is to share your experiences and it also helps the world to know what happened to mankind, how low mankind can sink when people are reduced to beasts and manipulated by dictators. The holocaust was an outrage against humanity. It is difficult to find an expression to describe it. It is the ultimate of human degradation and humiliation. We are trying to tell the world so this cannot happen again and we have learned a lot, although many have still not learned from the past unfortunately.

Other testimonies from East Renfrewshire residents include the full illustrated text of Dorrieth M. Sim's children's book, *In My Pocket*, which recounts the story of her

traveling to Britain as a child on the Kindertransport to escape the persecution of the Nazis:

I was seven and a half when my visa was stamped on 26 July.

There were almost 10,000 children like me, who came to the United Kingdom before World War II began. Some of us were babies; most of us were Jewish. We were each given a place on a Kindertransport out of Nazi Europe. After the War, some of us were reunited with our families. Sadly, many of us were not, and we either stayed in our new countries, where we grew up, or went to live in different countries, all over the world.

At the heart of the site is the message of the universality of experience of victims of ethnic genocide. While much of the emphasis is on the Jewish community, due to the nature of the day it was commemorating, the testimonials from other communities put the experiences in a wider context for visitors. Thus it was also important to the creators of the resource to allow young people to put the Holocaust in not only its World War Two context, but as an example of how genocide can affect ethnic communities in the world across the decades, as well as educating them about the local impact such atrocities have. The site emphasizes other atrocities such as those seen in recent years in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia-Herzegovina that affected other ethnic groups as well as the Jewish community.

Local schools in the area were included in the project and pupils were asked to create artwork and poetry built around the themes of Holocaust. This material is especially well suited to presentation via the site, and has ensured the site is a truly multi-generation community-based effort.

User Feedback

Since the site went live in January of 2004, feedback received has been immensely gratifying, not merely from visitors to the site and exhibition, but also from the wider professional community. A virtual Guest Book allowed visitors to post their own comments about the information presented on the site and on the accompanying physical exhibition which complimented the site. Below are some of the comments received about the exhibition and site:

07-JAN-04 I am proud that East Renfrewshire remembers the tragedy of the Holocaust every year, proud that we have the largest Jewish Population in Scotland and proud that we have a large and growing Muslim population. I'm most proud that we all live together as one community. Perhaps we are learning. If we are, a large part of the reason is this Memorial.

10-JAN-04 A moving and at times harrowing exhibition. I am so appreciative of the Council's expertise in putting on this display in conjunction with the other bodies concerned. I thought the venue, in such dignified surroundings, added to the poignancy of this event. I thought the way in which events in World War II were brought in to the context of present day life (Bosnia, Stephen Lawrence etc.) was especially relevant. Will we ever learn?

21-JAN-04 I learned a lot about what happened and I think it was a terrible thing. The more people who know about it the better and they should never be forgotten.

25-FEB-04 This is a brilliant website. Huge thanks to those who made this website possible, it's a great help for school projects. Cheers.

Another visitor to the site who completed the Guest Book, imparted his own story about an acquaintance he met who had suffered great loss as a result of the genocide in Bosnia:

19-MAR-04 Hello. Few months ago I met a girl from Bosnia in London where I live (I am Spanish). She is in London since before the horrible war started in her country. She is in Bosnia in this moment after over 10 years without see her mom and grandma who died just days before she goes. I fell very sad for her. I can not imagine how hard has to be live far away from your country with the impossibility to back for several years. And when you are allowed find the place where you used to live destroyed and your family house full of bullets holes with no money to take them off and forget as soon as you can what happened there. My friend is depressed and she wants come back because when she left 14 years ago her country was a nice place, now, she says the only thing she is got in there is her mother. What horrible is the war and what horrible is leave your home your family and your friends to come back a decade after and find only destruction. Thanks very much.

One of the most beneficial aspects to creating a web resource of an exhibition that may only be in a physical location for a short time, is that the web version can remain available permanently, and be a resource that is available to a larger audience of visitors from all around the country and the world. The Holocaust Memorial Day site, then, stands as a testament for the future, and visitors to the site can access the gathered material 24 hours a day and 365 days a year, ensuring the hard work put into the development is continuingly worthwhile. It is anticipated that the material gathered will continue to be an educational resource for the community in East Renfrewshire and beyond.

Libraries can become essential tools for education in local history by emphasising the need to create digital versions of any local history exhibitions they create. While housing such exhibitions within local community libraries is a valuable service, when such a large amount of research is invested into providing an informative gateway to the resource, it seems a wasted opportunity to allow the work to be limited only to a time when a physical exhibition can be sited. To this end, the creation of the Holocaust Memorial Day site simultaneously with the physical exhibition, has been a major success for the library service.

National recognition for project

In an exciting development for the service and those involved in creating the site, the project was runner-up in the 2004 CILIP/LiS Libraries Change Lives Award. This national award recognises innovative and exciting work in the fields of social inclusion, education and life-long learning in libraries and their communities.

The recognition from CILIP reflected the fact that both the CD-ROM and the web site are aimed at the whole community and have been used as an educational tool in libraries and schools across Scotland. Councillor Allan Steele, convener for community services in East Renfrewshire, said: "I'm delighted that the outstanding work of our libraries has been recognised and shortlisted for this prestigious award. The Holocaust Remembrance Project is part of East Renfrewshire's community portal approach which aims to promote IT as a way of enhancing opportunity and quality of life, to improve access to citizens' information, provide education and learning opportunities and to support a sense of place in communities. The project has been welcomed by our Jewish community and the wider Jewish community throughout the world."

Nigel Thomas from Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service is chair of the judges. He said: "We saw a particularly good variety of projects this year. The decision on which entries to shortlist was a tough one, as all the entries reflected the innovative ideas library and information services are bringing to their communities. East Renfrewshire is showing how community work can result in the creation of first rate learning materials on the web and CD-ROM with its work with holocaust survivors."

Conclusions

The work on the project reflects how the local aspect to an international tragic event such as the Holocaust is of paramount importance in allowing the local community, many of whom are directly related to those Jewish immigrants who came to Scotland, to better understand their own place in history. Added to this, the opportunity to put such tragedies as the Holocaust in context with similar, and more recent, events such as those experienced in Rwanda and Bosnia, can aid the education process for children and young people, and ensure that such events are never forgotten. Worldwide events can have an enormous impact on the local history of communities, and the project has brought this home to the community of East Renfrewshire in an informative and reflective way.

Figures I/II - the accompanying CD-ROM



Figure III - the main page of the web portal

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

HOLOCAUST remembrance 2004

East Renfrewshire COUNCIL
April 17, 2004

Search Site Contents

Welcome to East Renfrewshire Council's Holocaust Website

We invite you to use our unique website to learn more about the Holocaust and, in particular, how it impacted on all of the people of East Renfrewshire, home to Scotland's largest Jewish community.

We would like your help to continue to develop these pages so please let us know if you want to share your story or allow us to use your memorabilia.

Please contact: informationservices@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

[Our Statement of Purpose.](#)

Oral history enables users to enhance their understanding of selected issues from the Holocaust relating to survivors' testimonies

testimonies

culture

other victims

holocausts

resources

In Focus
10 years have passed since the Rwandan Genocide, which is also the theme of Holocaust Remembrance 2004.
[Learn About the Rwandan Holocaust.](#)

East Renfrewshire Testimonies
Dorrieth M. Sim
Kindertransport. Dorrieth recalls vividly that she had a red shoulder bag and a toy dog under her arm and that many children were crying.
[Read Dorrieth's Book Online.](#)

News
Prize Nomination
The Holocaust Web portal and CDROM has been shortlisted for a top UK award.
[Read Press Release.](#)

Feature
Children's Art Work
East Renfrewshire school children have created art work that is a unique and personal response to the Holocaust.
[View Children's Art Work.](#)

[Guest Book.](#) [Contact.](#) [Explore the Site.](#)

'What horrible is the war and what horrible is leave your home your family and your friends' - Jay

'It is beyond my comprehension how anyone could live through such terrible things' - Eileen

'I thought the stories that Ernest told were so moving and interesting' - Jordon

Figure IV - Dorrieth M. Sim's *In My Pocket*

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

East Renfrewshire COUNCIL
April 16, 2004

Search the Site

[Dorrieth M. Sim](#) [Bibliography](#) [In My Pocket](#) Page 9

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**On the boat, it was strange sleeping without our parents.
Only brothers and sisters knew anyone.
In the night, some children got lost.
They left their cabins to look for the bathrooms,
and could not remember their way back.**

Page 9 (asleep in cabin berth, on boat)

On the boat, it was strange sleeping without our parents.

Only brothers and sisters knew anyone.

In the night, some children got lost.

They left their cabins to look for the bathrooms,

and could not remember their way back.

Figure V – Recounting the Rwandan genocide

April 17, 200

HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL DAY

Search the Site

Search Go

Maps



Holocaust > Holocausts > Rwanda



Rwanda 1994 DEAD 800,000

Beginning on April 6, 1994, and for the next hundred days, up to 800,000 Tutsis were killed by Hutu militia using clubs and machetes, with as many as 10,000 killed each day. <http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/gen-rwa.php>

image shown above: Refugees from Rwanda in Goma, Zaire, 1994.
source: United Human Rights Council

In 1959, three years before independence from Belgium, the majority ethnic group, the Hutus, overthrew the ruling Tutsi king. Over the next several years, thousands of Tutsis were killed, and some 150,000 driven into exile in neighbouring countries. The children of these exiles later formed a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, and began a civil war in 1990. The war, along with several political and economic upheavals, exacerbated ethnic tensions, and beginning on April 6, 1994, and for the next hundred days, up to 800,000 Tutsis were killed by Hutu militia using clubs and machetes, with as many as 10,000 killed each day.

The Tutsi rebels defeated the Hutu regime and ended the killing in July 1994, but approximately 2 million Hutu refugees - many fearing Tutsi retribution - fled to neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire. Since then, most of the refugees have returned to Rwanda. Despite substantial international assistance and political reforms - including Rwanda's first local elections in March 1999 - the country continues to struggle to boost investment and agricultural output and to foster reconciliation. A series of massive population displacements, a nagging Hutu extremist insurgency, and Rwandan involvement in two wars over the past four years in the neighbouring DROC continue to hinder Rwanda's efforts.

Although on a large scale, this genocide was carried out entirely by hand, often using machetes and clubs. The men who'd been trained to massacre were members of civilian death squads, the Interahamwe. Where the killers encountered opposition, the Army backed them up with manpower and weapons. The State provided Hutu Power's supporting organisation, politicians, officials, intellectuals and professional soldiers deliberately incited (and where necessary bribed) the killers to do their work.

Local officials assisted in rounding up victims and making suitable places available for their slaughter. Tutsi men, women, children and babies were killed in thousands in schools. They were also killed in churches: some clergy colluded in the crime. The victims, in their last moments alive, were also faced by another appalling fact: their cold-blooded killers were people they knew - neighbours, work-mates, former friends, sometimes even relatives through

Film
Films on the Rwandan Genocide

Bibliography
Books on the Rwandan Genocide

Links
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Human Rights Watch: Leave None to Tell the Story - Genocide in Rwanda

Official Web Site of the Government of Rwanda