



1.2 Foreword by Ruth Barnett



Detention camp with Gypsies ©Robert Dawson Collection, RSG

I am delighted to have been invited to write a foreword for this long awaited pack of learning material to bring to light the story of the European Roma caught up in the Nazi Holocaust. This story, in my opinion, should have been part of Holocaust education from the beginning instead of the Jewish-only narrative that first emerged.

The very first learning centre and memorial to Holocaust victims was created in Israel, almost immediately after Israel itself was created in 1948. As so many of the immigrants to Israel were Holocaust survivors, Yad Vashem (literally 'hand of God'), as the memorial centre in Jerusalem is called, naturally focused on the Jewish victims. The Holocaust gradually became generally accepted as 'Jewish property' and 'a Jewish story'. The other victims: Roma as a whole people, disabled and homosexual people and political opponents, were air-brushed out.

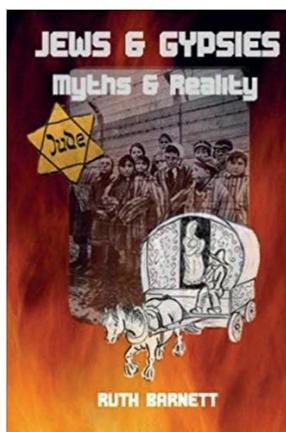
At the end of World War Two in 1945 the whole of Europe and far beyond lay devastated. The people who had lived through it were traumatised as well as stressed, largely undernourished and exhausted. They could barely muster the energy to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives and struggle against the shortages of everything. The true horror of the crimes committed in that war, including the Holocaust, could not be faced and were not spoken about. It did not begin to register in the public domain for almost half a century.

The Holocaust Education Trust (HET) was formed in 1988, forty-three years after the end of the war, and began to promote general awareness and teaching post-war born generations who had not been told what happened by their parents who had lived through it, but had not been able to talk about it. It was due to pressure from HET that in September 1991 the British government put Holocaust education in the national curriculum as a requirement in all secondary schools and to all students. It was at this point that I joined a group, organised by the London Jewish Cultural Centre (LJCC), of people willing to go into schools and support the teachers by telling their personal story of surviving the Holocaust to groups of children. I started telling my personal Kinder transport story in the 1990s.

Pretty soon, I was extremely disturbed, when I asked the audiences what group in their local community did people say nasty things about today and not want them living nearby. I frequently had negative replies about Gypsies phrased in ways reminiscent of Nazi propaganda. To my surprise and delight most teachers realised very quickly that the Roma part of the Holocaust needed to be included.

The source material for learning about Roma in the Holocaust has been very limited and this learning resource is very much needed and particularly valuable as it has been created by Roma themselves. This learning resource, through presenting what Roma families value will contribute much to the understanding that everyone is a member of the one human race.

Ruth Barnett, May 2019



Jews and Gypsies, Myths and Reality by Ruth Barnett