



Sixth Form Mercury

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Into Auschwitz...

By Ollie Hughes

Throughout the city of Krakow, in southern Poland, tour companies advertise their trips. While some talk about the medieval castle or the salt mines, most have a recurring theme – the Second World War. Schindler's factory was in Krakow, and today it has been converted into a huge museum. Krakow was also home to a large Jewish Ghetto, set up by their Nazi overlords. However, there is one item that features on every tour. About 60 kilometres south of Krakow lies the unassuming village of Oswiecim – or as the Germans called it, Auschwitz.



As someone who has an enormous interest in the World Wars, for something to be advertised in such a way was quite a surprise to me. The battlefields of Ypres and Passendale, for example, are only marked with the occasional signpost. The beaches of D-Day and Dunkirk, too, are scarcely mentioned in the local towns in France. I began to worry – surely one of the scenes of some of the most tragic events in human history would not be so commercialised?

As we boarded the coach that was to take us, the other passengers chatted and laughed with each other and my fears began to grow. They did, however, calm down when our representative put a documentary on, detailing the Soviet accounts of when they first liberated the death camp, coincidentally on my birthday – 19 January 1945. The film was based around an interview with the Soviet cameraman who took the first pictures of the prisoners who remained, and of the demolished ruins of the gas chambers. The scale of the camps became clear – in addition to the two large work camps, Auschwitz I and III (Monowitz), and the death camp in Auschwitz II (Birkenau), there were around 45 additional satellite camps dotted around the area.

Feeling significantly more downcast, we disembarked about one and a quarter hours after leaving Krakow's city centre. We had parked outside Auschwitz I amidst dozens of other coaches, and tour-

ists from all over the world milled around in their thousands. There seemed to be school trips, family outings, even a group of gypsies. As a tourist attraction, it certainly seemed to be bringing in the crowds – and to me, this was totally unexpected.

We passed through a large hall and were given headsets – not audioguides, but a rather nifty piece of kit which enabled us to hear our English-speaking guide, Lucas, without him having to raise his voice. One cannot enter the camp without a tour guide. As we began our tour, we were told that the building we had just passed through was the central administrative building for the camp – where prospective prisoners were processed by the Germans. We rounded a corner and there before us was the infamous sign – “Arbeit macht frei”: “Work sets you free” – although this was a replica, as the original was stolen in December 2009.

The first thing which knocks down the tourist attraction image is the fact that one is only allowed to take pictures in a very select number of locations. Lucas reprimanded a couple who saw fit to take a picture of themselves by the electrified barbed wire fence with an original German “Halt!” sign on it, and my camera remained in my pocket throughout the tour.

If you have been to the Imperial War Museum in London, you may remember the Holocaust exhibition, and the shoes that line a model of Auschwitz II. The barrack

blocks in Auschwitz I have each been converted into a museum of sorts. We were soon subject to some incredibly gruesome sights – a room filled with three tonnes of human hair, and a rug made from hair by Jewish labourers. Another is filled with suitcases from the prisoners, each marked with the date of birth and date of arrival – and seeing a July 1942 date of birth certainly brought peoples' hands to their mouths.

Other rooms were filled with prosthetic limbs, eye-glasses, combs and brushes – all sorts of per-

sonal effects taken from the prisoners, including, of course, a room with 20,000 shoes. Most horrifying were the empty tins of Zyklon B pellets that were used to murder up to 4,000 people at a time. Two tins were enough – in a relatively small display there were over 200 tins.

We made our way towards the perimeter of the camp, past the Commandant's palatial house, as Lucas regaled us with a tale of four Jewish prisoners who stole German army uniforms and escaped in the Commandant's car: four of 144 who successfully escaped – out of 812 attempts. A gallows stood menacingly in front of a brick building, different from the barrack blocks. Here, the Commandant was hung after the war.

In the brick building is the first gas chamber and crematorium set up by the Nazis after the Wannsee Conference. We descended the steps into a room where the prisoners were forced to strip naked, so that their uniforms could be recycled and given to new inmates. A sign simply says “the SS murdered 90,000 people in this room”, as we walked through a large metal doorway and into the chamber. In the ceiling there are small square entrances, where soldiers would open a hatch and empty a tin of Zyklon B into the chamber. The heat of four hundred (often more) people squashed against one another would cause the pellets to react and begin giving off a lethal vapour, once the temperature reached 27 degrees. Within minutes, everyone in the room would be



Hey guys,
 Welcome to another year of magical Mercury mayhem. This issue we welcome a few debutants to the world of school journalism, as well as a few old favourites. Welcome to all the lower sixth who have just joined and we hope that many of you will both enjoy and maybe even contribute to the Mercury. However, you may be wondering who we are! We share many traits, for example we are both partial to the occasional gully riddim, complemented often by a dirty wobble bassline, and we both have an interest in journalism and media. We are currently in the upper sixth and love football with a passion! Now that the introductions are over, let's get straight into the action. Enjoy!
 Tim Hou and Will Roberts, chief editors

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dead. Through another door lay two ovens with rails that led into them. There, the Sonderkommando – prisoners that had agreed to work for the Germans in exchange for better living conditions and rations – would have to take the bodies out of the chamber and burn them. The ashes would be disposed of in the forest nearby, or sometimes used to make fertiliser for crops. The whole process of murder took about 20 minutes.

The horror of Auschwitz I was not confined to the gas chamber. If anything, those who were kept alive in order to be used as slave labour had it worse, having to live in tiny, cramped rooms with hundreds of other people, fitting three onto a bed designed for one. We went to the infamous Block 11 – the barrack block used for the “People’s Court” by the Gestapo and the SS. The “execution wall” remains outside, with bullet holes clearly visible – where over 300 people were shot. In the basement lie a number of chambers – tiny standing chambers, only two feet wide and five feet tall, where people had to crawl through a cat flap-like entrance on their belly and stand for weeks, often without food or sanitation. There were suffocation chambers, where there was no light at all and only a tiny air hole. And only a few “normal” cells, with small air holes and a bucket for a toilet, with some straw as a bed, all preserved as they were. A single candle burns in one room, set up by Pope John Paul II, in honour of a priest who gave his life to save another inmate.

Shaken, our tour of Auschwitz I came to an end and we made our way back to the coach for a five-minute journey to the even more infamous Auschwitz II – Birkenau. Polish houses lie only metres away from the iconic gatehouse that is seen in films like *Schindler’s List*, with the train tracks running out into the fields, joining onto the train line that is used today. While Auschwitz I was built by the Polish army in the 1920s and was simply converted by the Nazis, Auschwitz II was built by the Nazis with the purpose of exterminating the races the Nazis believed were

inferior. The Nazis attempted to burn the evidence of their crimes down in Auschwitz II, so we were fairly limited in what we could see – apart from the fact the camp is 30 times the size of Auschwitz I in total. We did, however, see one of the latrine blocks – a flimsy wooden shelter filled with stone holes, which would be 30 degrees in the summer and -30 in the winter. Lucas told us that being assigned to latrine cleaning as a duty was one of the best jobs in the camp, as literally “being in the shit” kept you warm.

We walked past a train carriage, where hundreds of people would be crammed into a space designed for a few cattle, and Lucas told us of a tourist he once had, a German, who saw one of the pictures set up, taken by the SS, of a German doctor deciding on who should be sent, left, to the gas chambers and who should be sent, right, to the workers’ blocks. In this particular picture, the doctor is sending a group of elderly men to the left, and behind him stands a soldier who smiles grimly – and this German tourist recognised that soldier as his father, who had never spoken of it.

I cannot hope to comprehend what must have gone through his mind when he found out, and that horrified confusion, that disgusted incomprehension is exactly the feeling one has at Auschwitz. How is it that a modern, civilised, industrious people organised the methodical slaughter of twelve million people without anyone saying anything about it?

Our tour ended by the gas chambers and the memorial that was set up. These chambers are ruins, having been demolished just hours before the Soviets arrived – although one was burned down during an attempted uprising by the Sonderkommando in 1944. Candles burn in rings around the ruins, and the ponds outside where the ashes of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children – Jews, Slavs, gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill, communists, black people, ethnic Poles, even prisoners of war – were dumped.

The fences are now lined with trees, and the memorial, designed in part by Hungarian and Italian architects, has some 20 slabs in front of it which give a very simple message in different languages.

The people in charge of running the camps nowadays tell us that they believe it is something everyone should see in their lifetime, and I firmly agree. While I didn’t approve of the overly touristy approach, the solemn silence in which we all returned to Krakow is a testament to how well they have presented the horrible truth. I can honestly say that nothing will ever compare to it. It is harrowing, humbling and shocking to the greatest extreme, but in my opinion no adjective can really sum up what it is like to stand in that gas chamber. You have to experience it for yourself.

Engineering Club

A brand new club is starting up, which is available only to members of the Sixth Form. Engineering Club is available for people to gain a deeper insight into what engineering is. Also, it could be a great extra-curricular activity to mention on your personal statement and UCAS form, as it shows that you have looked further into engineering.

The first meeting is on Monday 10 October in the South Study at 1:25. For more information please see Tim Hou, Ben Collyer or Dr Cooper.



Warp Speed Ahead, Mr Spock

It seems that Freddie Mercury called it all those years ago. Scientists working at the OPERA project at CERN, the world's largest particle accelerator, appear to have made a startling discovery that threatens to completely blow apart our current conceptions of science. Recent results from the Oscillation Project with Emulsion-Tracking Apparatus Project at CERN seemed to show that neutrinos, elementary subatomic particles, being projected from one point to another reached their destination a fraction of a second before light would.

Now, these claims should be taken with a pinch of salt, as this is not the first time scientists have made such incredulous claims - and been wrong. But if these claims are true - and it will be a while until we find that out - it would be the equivalent of somebody beating a personification of physics with a dead fish.

So what are the implications of this bombshell? Well, first off it means that Einstein was wrong and that long favourite phrase is completely wrong. For all intents and purposes we would be living in a world where 'E=mc²' is just a sculpture in Berlin - nothing else. This,

for one thing, means that you could travel through space at faster-than-light speeds - like the aforementioned lead singer of Queen. You could reach our sun in less than eight minutes. Eat breakfast on Pluto, have a spot of lunch on Neptune and drink tea on Uranus. You could reach distant solar systems in mere months. It could solve the population problem we have at the moment. You would have so much space you wouldn't know what to do with it. We could travel to extra-solar planets, and make regular trips to our neighbours to acquire the additional resources that we so desperately need on our planet.

And then there's the fun part: 'time travel.' This has been possible until now, but it has had one major flaw: once you travelled to the future, there was no way back. Since time is relative, the faster you move the slower time goes for you. This means that by travelling at close to the speed of light, you could age only a mere 11 minutes while the rest of the world had aged several hundred years. And then you'd be stuck there. But now, if you get into your little blue police box or DeLorean and travel at a speed faster than that of light, you

By Anurag Deshpande

would be going so fast that you would in fact travel backwards through time.

So you know that really embarrassing thing you did that one time? Yeah, that's the one. Well, you could go back and fix that. Just don't forget the Butterfly Effect - or else when you return you'll find an Earth decimated by a horde of angry clowns (or something of that nature!).

Of course, this also has great implications for the energy sector. Imagine accelerating simple molecules such as water to such great speeds, and getting them to hit a turbine at these speeds. The electricity generated through these could generate enough power to light cities.

So you see: this discovery really is big. If proven correct, it will open the floodgates for previously impossible things.

However, this really is a massive "if". There is no guarantee this result is right and, in fact, it is most likely that there was an embarrassing gaffe somewhere down the line. Only time will tell.

Booking Yourself A Place At University

By Kane Walpole

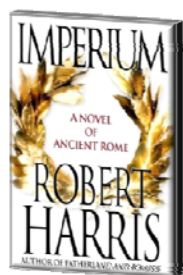
In a competitive world, how does a student stand out from the crowd? Being well read is a big advantage, but where does one begin their quest for words? The answer is right here!

This fortnightly feature will bring you some of the best works in a range of subjects. For the mathematicians, for the scientists, for the journalists and for everyone else, these books will be of use to you in whatever you do.

Fiction
Imperium
Robert Harris
★★★★★

Who's it for? Classicists, Historians, Politicians, Linguists and 'interesting people'.

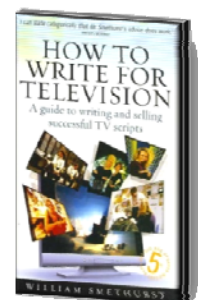
What's it about? This surprisingly exciting novel brings us a historically accurate tale of the life of Cicero. Not only is the content incredibly accurate but its details into the politics of Rome, some of the details of public speaking and its interesting plotline make it perfect for almost anyone; even those not interested in classics itself!



Non-Fiction
How to Write For Television
William Smethurst
★★★★★

Who's it for? Scriptwriters, writers, actors, media and 'English enthusiasts'.

What's it about? This book is the scriptwriter's dream handbook. If you have an interest not only in writing for, but working in, TV this is very useful, giving contacts and websites for help with your scripts and works.





Riman's Roundup: School Boys vs Old Boys

By Harley Riman

Saturday 24th saw the school's senior football teams take a trip across the borough to Bromley for the annual School Boys vs Old Boys matches. The day consists of four teams of schoolboys taking on four teams from Old Wilsonians FC, consisting of ex-schoolboys and teachers. The only prizes up for grabs are bragging rights and pride, however this is enough to bring a serious edge to the games as well as reveal the (over-) competitive and zealous nature of some participants (namely a certain Mr Englefield).

The first XI went into the day with a 100% record and overflowing with confidence. Spirits were high until around an hour before kick-off when news came through of the withdrawal due to illness of the brothers bottle-job, Ola and Tobi. With two key players missing, the masses were expecting the team to descend into disarray, but the years of hard work, and dedication to the badge

and each other, gave us the strength to continue.

However, the renewed determination did not manifest itself in the performance as the team was unable to replicate the delicious football displayed earlier in the season. Against a highly physical and organised team, the firsts were unable to move the ball with the vigour and precision that the hallowed turf of Wilson's school has become accustomed to. But a valiant defensive performance and some late dominance allowed the score to remain goalless at half-time.

The second half was a different story. The defiant display turned out not to be enough as the deadlock was broken by Old Boys first XI 15 minutes into the second half. The schoolboys were able to pull one back thanks to some nightmare defending, culminating in an own goal from 25 yards out. This, however, was still not enough as the Old Boys

added two more to their tally and were able to hold onto the lead, the game ending 3-1 to the home side.

Other results included a late 3-2 win for the second XI; a gallant 2-2 draw for the third XI and a brave 5-0 loss for the fourth XI.

Despite the poor results, heads were still high among the schoolboys as precious experience was gained that will be useful in future matches. The post-game entertainment included a shameful dance competition featuring Nish, Gregg, Kieran Steadford and Will Roberts (see Harley for video) as well as some premium pies and much else.

The day was a definite success thanks to the great work from the organisers and staff at Old Wilsonians FC.

OWFC may have won the football, but the true winners of the day were camaraderie and banter.

Street Art or Vandalism?

By Tom Bell

Whenever the words 'street art' are uttered, the name of 'Banksy' is bound to follow. Stemming from the Bristol underground scene, he has now achieved international acclaim for his amalgamation of satirical stencil art and subversive slogans.

Banksy has risen to such popularity that he has been generally recognized as a legitimate street artist, rather than a vandal. In fact, Banksy has become undeniably mainstream, with many exhibition pieces auctioning for astronomical sums of money, and attracting interest from such celebrity buyers as Brad Pitt, Christina Aguilera and Justin Timberlake.

However, the negative connotations commonly arising from the term 'mainstream' cannot be considered to detract from Banksy's work in the slightest - on the contrary, they only serve to heighten the growth of the street art movement through widening its audience.

In fact, the new-found and widespread nature of Banksy's work, and indeed the street art movement in its entirety, highlights the one crucial aspect in which it is unrivalled by virtually any other - it is universal.

To admire street art, as Banksy himself rightly stated, "you don't need an education and there's no admission fee".

This allows the social and political commentary of the work to address a wider audience, consisting of all tiers of society. For this reason, the street art scene offers young people, in particular, an accessible platform to express their views - all they require is a spray can.

Thankfully, Barking and Dagenham council have addressed the issue and recognized street art as a legitimate art form, installing the 'ArtScape' project, which has given many young offenders the opportunity to participate in street art projects as community service.

One worker in this project is an artist coined the 'Cassette Lord', who has been given permission by the council to paint Brighton phone boxes, thus transforming them into bright cassette tapes. Walking through the streets of Brighton, I found that these 'tapes' did not detract from the surrounding area at all, but instead added a refreshing feel to it.

Progressive schemes such as these, allowing councils and street artists to work in conjunction, have proved to be highly successful thus far. At a time of worrying decline in political activism in Britain, particularly amongst youth, you would expect the government to put a greater focus on such schemes, as opposed to simply punishing attempts of expression.

Many of the arguments put forward for street art revolve around the principle that it tends to be something of a stage for demonstrating the beliefs of the artist; the airing of a social and political commentary on the society we live in.

Therefore, some distinction must be made between street art and the mindless 'tagging' which is, in my view, no more worthwhile than scrawling your name across a park bench - and generally offers nothing of any intrigue to passers-by.



And so, a question posed to all readers: If Banksy's work is recognized as art, and even allowed to be hosted at exhibitions and sold at auctions, why should other street artists not deserve the same treatment? After all, humans have been painting on walls since the dawn of man.