

## CHAPTER 2

# The Braintree Experiment: Demonstrating the “British Way of Life” to German Prisoners of War in Post-War Britain

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**T**his chapter examines an overlooked aspect of the re-education of German prisoners of war (POWs for short) in Britain: namely the Braintree Experiment. Initiated in Essex, it sought to familiarise POWs with “the British way of life” through practical demonstration and social interaction, focusing on the prisoners located at the ‘Youth Camp’ at Radwinter near Saffron Walden. While existing studies mention this re-education effort in passing, this chapter offers a fuller account of its origins, organisation, and impact as a quasi-official initiative within the wider re-education scheme conducted in Britain.<sup>1</sup> This investigation draws on records from the Foreign Office and Control Office for Germany and Austria at The National Archives (UK), alongside national and local newspapers, as it reconstructs the Experiment’s development and activities. This chapter shows that sociability was central to British re-education, which was cultivated through organised encounters that

were seen as vital for fostering favourable attitudes towards Britain and its democratic institutions. The Experiment's conversational exercises, excursions, and social gatherings complemented official aims and in retrospect it highlights the role of the voluntary sector. The chapter begins by outlining the wider re-education scheme and initiatives promoting relational contact between prisoners and members of the British public following the relaxation of the non-fraternisation principles.

### **THE RE-EDUCATION OF GERMAN POWS IN BRITAIN**

From comparative studies of British, American, and Soviet approaches to denazification to localised individual initiatives, the effort to democratise Germany after the Second World War has generated a substantial and diverse historiography that illuminates this matter.<sup>2</sup> Assessments of the British re-education efforts in particular have diverged. David Welch judged it: "... a rather arrogant and foolish notion which fizzled out as it deserved to."<sup>3</sup> In response, Michael Balfour – drawing on his own experience in the Psychological War Division and later the Control Commission—argued the aim of re-education: "...to produce a Germany which was a free and responsible society, anchored in the western community of nations ..." had largely been realised.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the wider denazification and democratisation agenda set out in the Potsdam Agreement, Britain established a programme to "re-educate" German POWs who found themselves in its custody.<sup>5</sup> Retained in Britain until 1948, this captive 'audience' was: "... subject to more concerted British [...] efforts than the population at large."<sup>6</sup> The need for "some sort of political re-education" was recognised within weeks of the first German POWs being captured. A War Cabinet memorandum of 18 December 1939 noted that the 257 POWs already showed the evident effects of intensive Nazi indoctrination and prolonged isolation from the rest of Europe.<sup>7</sup> The process began in earnest when responsibility for the re-education of German POWs in Britain and the Middle East was transferred to the Political Warfare Executive (or PWE for short) on 18 September 1944.<sup>8</sup> Persuading POWs of the merits of democracy was considered as a crucial preparation: "... for the coming struggle of ideologies in post-war Europe."<sup>9</sup> The programme sought to dismantle Nazi and militarist beliefs and promote an understanding of democratic principles, presenting "the British Commonwealth of Nations as an example of a democratic community in action without demanding the models followed in Britain to be slavishly copied."<sup>10</sup> Aside from compulsory film-screen-

ings of liberation footage from the concentration camps, participation in re-educational activities remained voluntary.<sup>11</sup>

The re-education effort was administered by the Prisoner of War Division of the Foreign Office abbreviated as the POWD. Initially part of the PWE, the POWD was transferred to the Control Commission for Germany and Austria or COGA on 1 July 1946 following the dissolution of the PWE.<sup>12</sup> Within Britain, the POWD Field Section organised re-education and supervised Training Advisors who reported on the progress of the programme. The Re-education Section distributed films, lectures, and reading materials. A key step was to “screen each prisoner and separate the incorrigibles” from the rest of the captives.<sup>13</sup> Screening involved interviewing POWs and determining their political outlook.<sup>14</sup> The classification system used in this endeavour—“White” (A+ to A-), “Grey” (B+ to B-), and “Black” (C+ to C-)—mirrored contemporary terminology used for propaganda audiences. “Black” POWs, who were identified as committed Nazis, were removed from camps to prevent them from undermining the re-education efforts and intimidating or harming anti-Nazi POWs. Re-screening of the prisoners later served to measure changes in political attitudes and help determine the repatriation schedules.

Younger POWs were regarded as requiring special attention. This led to the establishment of a dedicated POWD-run facility for youthful POWs. Camp #180 at Radwinter in Essex—known officially as “The Youth Camp”—which held POWs aged seventeen to twenty-six.<sup>15</sup> While a German Working Camp nominally supplied agricultural labour, a rotating group of POWs remained in the camp one day per week for compulsory classes. POWs could choose between afternoon sessions, covering languages, literature, mathematics, and history.<sup>16</sup> The atmosphere that was aimed for was deliberately relaxed: barbed wire was absent and military ranks were not used. Although the War Office and camp commandant oversaw administration, a permanent POWD Training Advisor was allotted to Camp #180. The re-education practises of the Youth Camp contrasted sharply with other camps such as the more selective Training Centre at Wilton Park.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Wilton Park admitted cohorts of around 300 carefully screened “White” POWs for an intensive six-week course, Radwinter—designed for 1,300 POWs—included “Black” elements and imposed a minimum stay of three months.<sup>18</sup> Opened in July 1946, the POWs who transferred to the Youth Camp from elsewhere in Britain were quickly joined by 300 prisoners from Germany and 400 from Canada. Visiting the camp in December 1946, a POWD English Inspector—tasked with reviewing English instruction at the camp—reported: “More

good work is being done in this group than any I have visited, and I would like to suggest a fairly early return to it for my second visit.”<sup>19</sup>

### **“AMBASSADORS IN CHAINS”: POW-CIVILIAN RELATIONS**

Interest in the treatment of German POWs was not confined to policymakers. Individuals and pressure-groups concerned with the welfare of POWs increasingly challenged official policies, characterising indefinite retention of the prisoners as a form of “slave labour”.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent organisation in Britain was Save Europe Now (SEN), launched in September 1945 by the publisher and philanthropist Victor Gollancz. Initially, SEN focused on the desperate conditions in occupied Germany. Gollancz published critical accounts gathered from surviving Germans through his Left Book Club, including Fenner Brockway’s *German Diary*.<sup>21</sup> Gollancz himself travelled to the British zone of occupied Germany and published articles condemning aspects of British policy.<sup>22</sup>

In 1946, SEN expanded its attention to the fate of German POWs in Britain. It petitioned Prime Minister Clement Attlee to accelerate the repatriation efforts and to overturn the policy of non-fraternisation between prisoners and civilians, warning that the prohibition of social contact risked casting POWs as pariahs and undermining post-war reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> Reports of declining morale—including suicides—fuelled fears that disillusioned POWs might turn to communism as Cold War tensions crystallised. Attlee responded with a phased repatriation scheme in September 1946, when the POW population peaked at around 400,000 individuals. Although fraternisation remained contentious, the ban was relaxed in December 1946, allowing greater civilian-POW interaction.

While national campaigns like SEN put pressure on the government, individuals and local communities—especially church groups—took matters into their own hands. Social contact with German POWs was seen as essential to improve conditions and foster positive views of the British and democratic ideals. Among the first to act was the Quaker Miss Bessie Midgley, who placed a “POWs Welcome” sign on her door in Saffron Walden and offered an ‘open house’ to POWs from Radwinter Youth Camp. She hosted gatherings, including a birthday party for 19-year-old Adam Merz attended by seventy POWs, with the strict understanding that political discussions were absolutely banned.<sup>24</sup> In an interview with the *Essex Chronicle*, the 68-year-old Midgley explained that her family had previously operated a canteen for troops during the First World War. Drawing on this experience, she sought to provide the prisoners with a sense of domestic

normality by offering a space where they could play games, read, and discuss the difficulties facing their families in Germany.<sup>25</sup>

Calls to reach out to the Youth Camp POWs were also made from the pulpit. After the lifting of the non-fraternisation rules, the Reverend Roy Sinker, rector of St. Mary's Church in Saffron Walden, urged parishioners to show goodwill towards German POWs. In a sermon, he described them as "ambassadors in chains" and asked families to welcome a POW from the Youth Camp into their homes for Christmas. The appeal provoked mixed reactions. Some parishioners were offended by the suggestion of entertaining Germans in their homes.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, at least twenty nearby residents extended invitations to the commandant of the Youth Camp, offering to host POWs on Christmas Day.<sup>27</sup> Churches became important spaces for fostering contact between the public and POWs. In January 1947, several concerts were performed by choirs from Radwinter. At Saffron Walden Parish Church, a 200 strong audience listened to a Youth Camp choir perform works by Bach and Mendelssohn. An *Essex Chronicle* correspondent reflected that: "...the presence of men who have lost their freedom seemed, somehow, to be out of place in one of England's finest parish churches, where preachers for centuries have extolled the freedom of the individual."<sup>28</sup>

Building on these early contacts, a social space for POWs was soon established. On 28 February 1947, Stephen Harris, Secretary of the Saffron Walden Christian Council, announced the opening of a "Club for German Prisoners" in the *Saffron Walden Weekly News*. Held in the Parish Room at St. Mary's Church, it met on Saturday afternoons, offering refreshments and games. Harris appealed for donations and volunteers—preferably of a similar age to the POWs. Though modest, he argued such hospitality offered respite and a glimpse of British life: "Our claim to have a way of life superior to that of Nazism means nothing unless we go out of our way to make some practical expression of it. [...] the Christian Council is glad to be able to make this small contribution towards ensuring that they return to Germany having seen something of England apart from camp life."<sup>29</sup>

The Club opened on 1 March 1947, with fifty Radwinter POWs attending. Councillor H. Collar, the Mayor of Saffron Walden, inaugurated the event. Addressing POWs through an interpreter, he challenged them to a game of chess—provided they were not too talented. Speaking on behalf of the POWs, Gunter Rubahm remarked: "I doubt whether anyone who has not gone through the experience would be able to appreciate fully what it means to men who have lived for years behind barbed wire to have human contacts again."<sup>30</sup> Despite the

appreciation shown by the POWs, local opinion remained divided. Letters to the *Saffron Walden Weekly News* criticised the Club. One ex-soldier quipped: "I suppose the next thing we shall hear is that they're serving the Germans morning tea in bed."<sup>31</sup> Another urged the Christian Council: "... to get a grip on themselves."<sup>32</sup> Several ex-service personnel complained that the suffering of British POWs in German captivity had been forgotten too quickly and resented the perceived lack of concern for British servicemen. As the summer progressed, participation from civilians decreased, leading POWs to express concern that the club was no longer serving its intended purpose. To renew engagement, a garden party was organised at Miss Midgley's home, bringing together 250 prisoners and seventy local residents, including those involved in running the club.<sup>33</sup>

### **THE ORIGINS OF THE BRAINTREE EXPERIMENT**

Alongside the opening of the Club for German Prisoners in Saffron Walden, a further initiative was established to familiarise POWs with "the British way of life". The Braintree Experiment sought to supplement the official re-education scheme by offering practical insight into British society through visits, demonstrations, and social encounters. Central to its planning was Tom Driberg, Labour MP for Maldon, who had heard a choir of POWs from Camp #180 who performed at Thaxted Church in January 1947. In an accompanying article, Driberg emphasised the importance of social interaction seeing it as a cornerstone in the re-education of young POWs:

"Whatever their degree of collective 'responsibility' for what was done in Germany – a matter on which historians, humanists and theologians may argue forever – all must have been subjected to the intensive, rigorous indoctrination of the Nazi ideologues. [...]. Those who talked with them at Thaxted were heartened to find them neither filled with hatred nor [...] robots, but normal, young human beings, with a quick and growing apprehension of a way of life and thought different from that in which they had been conditioned as boys. They are learning to question and to argue".<sup>34</sup>

Driberg was one of a small group of Labour and Liberal MPs who criticised government policies aimed towards German POWs, particularly the restrictions on fraternisation between prisoners and civilians. Although contemporary reports and official documents make clear that he played a leading role in the Experiment, biographical accounts of his life remain silent on his actual involvement.<sup>35</sup> Instead, they emphasise his post-war work as a *Reynolds News* correspondent in East Asia, reporting on the exploits of Allied troops in the region. As

a war correspondent, Driberg had seen the harsh realities of captivity, including the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, which he visited as part of an official delegation. His own personal history may also have shaped his interest in the matter: his mother, Amy Driberg, had organised a fund for British POWs during the First World War. His concern with the matter endured beyond the immediate post-war era, and during the Korean War he also visited British captives from that conflict. Whatever his motives, his engagement with the Youth Camp and his contacts with POWD Controller Wing Commander Hitch were crucial to the development of the Experiment.

Although the precise origins are difficult to reconstruct, the planning of and shift in practice began around the time the relaxation of the fraternisation ban was announced. In the weeks before Christmas 1946, representatives from the British Legion, the Women's Voluntary Service, and Workers Educational Alliance met with Braintree townspeople and agreed on the central aim of their efforts: "... a selected group of prisoners should gradually be given, week by week, a complete picture of the life of a small English town."<sup>36</sup> A further meeting, attended by around thirty POWs and a similar number of civilians, elected a joint civilian-POW committee to manage the scheme. According to Driberg: "initial shyness soon wore off; hosts and guests were mutually delighted by each other's humanity and intelligence."<sup>37</sup> Although surviving details are sparse, it is evident that social interaction lay at the very heart of the Experiment from its inception.

### **INTRODUCING "THE BRITISH WAY OF LIFE"**

The Experiment consisted of a series of sessions introducing POWs to British civic life, industry, and legal institutions. They combined expert instruction and explanations with practical social engagements. On 11 June 1947, sixty civilians and thirty POWs met at the Braintree Town Hall, where the Chairman of the Urban District Council delivered a "lively and informative address" on the workings of local government. A panel, including the Vice-Chairman and Council Surveyor, were enthusiastically questioned by POWs on social and political topics such as rates, elections and housing.<sup>38</sup> Subsequent sessions examined local industry. At Crittall Manufacturing Company—famous for producing steel-framed windows—the POWs "learned something of its production methods, of the structure of industry, of provision for workers' welfare, and of Trade Union organisation".<sup>39</sup> Their interest led to invitations to local trade unionists for further discussions and tours. Judicial institutions were the focus of another session. On 23 July 1947, forty German POWs—mostly from the Youth Camp, but also from other Essex

camps—visited Braintree police station and the courthouse behind the station which was defined by its art deco architectural designs. Inspector Baker led a tour of the cells and explained British policing procedures. The group was then driven to the Crittall Social Club in Silver End—the model village built by Francis Crittall for his workers—where Alred Jones, clerk to the Braintree Bench, lectured the prisoners on the judicial system. Jones remarked that: “... the English people were not afraid of policemen, but looked upon them as their friends”.<sup>40</sup> While the POWs “followed the address with marked interest”, it is impossible to know what they made of this claim.<sup>41</sup> The event was not just providing a window into British legal institutions and processes; it was also defined by its social components, even including refreshments that were served before the POWs returned to their camps. Later in the year, a correspondent for the *Essex Chronicle* gave a lecture on the British press to around fifty POWs at the Crittall Social Club.<sup>42</sup>

From Driberg’s perspective, the Experiment was not intended to replace the official programme. Rather, he framed re-education as something that extended beyond a limited and narrow pedagogical approach, emphasising a broader, exploratory re-education philosophy and a largely practical approach to dealing with the issue. Its blend of demonstration and focus on social interaction aimed not only at presenting modern democracy as an alternative to Nazism, but to make captivity itself more tolerable. Against a backdrop of public concern about the ongoing detention of German POWs, the hope was that they would return home as less resentful individuals, with a clearer understanding of how people could coexist within a democratic and free society. As in the official programme, the aim was not to promote a polished imitation of British democracy that was beyond criticism, but rather to present it as a system that, in general, was an effective way of governance while also ensuring the liberties and rights it promised the British public. The social aspect of this effort was regarded as just as significant as the educational aspect. In response to claims that the initiative amounted to little more than a sequence of lectures on democracy, Driberg emphasised the active and practical character of the programme. Rather than passive listening, the programme enabled POWs to engage directly with everyday life that was lived in a small English town and to interact with local residents on equal social terms.<sup>43</sup>

#### **“THE MOST USEFUL TYPE OF RE-EDUCATION”**

POWD officials recognised the value of the Experiment as a supplement to the official re-education scheme. Shortly after its establishment, POWD Controller Hitch wrote a personnel letter to Driberg thanking him for his work and for set-

ting it up.<sup>44</sup> Beyond its morale-boosting potential, the Experiment closely aligned with POWD priorities by encouraging discussion among POWs themselves about “the British way of life”. Although participation was necessarily limited to a small group, POWD staff envisaged a multiplicative effect of the programme, whereby selected POWs would relay their experiences to the others within the camp. P. H. MacDonald, who served as Youth Camp Training Advisor, observed that the thirty POWs selected for the first meeting were intended to contribute to the process of re-education by subsequently sharing their experiences with fellow prisoners through talks or discussion groups within the camps.<sup>45</sup> Reflecting more broadly on the process of re-education, Henry Faulk, head of the POWD Field Section, emphasised the importance of barrack-room discussions in shaping POW attitudes.<sup>46</sup> As Sam A Erkiletian demonstrated, German camp leaders were crucial in influencing: “... how POWs interpreted democratic norms and [their] overall participation in re-education.”<sup>47</sup> POWD officials such as Hitch and MacDonald, therefore understood that the Experiment’s greatest value lay not simply in what participants experienced directly, but in how those experiences circulated informally throughout the camps among the POWs.

The initiative also attracted the support of Lord Pakenham, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and, from April 1947, Foreign Secretary overseeing the responsibilities of the British Zone in Germany. Writing to Driberg in June 1947, Pakenham accepted an invitation to address the Experiment and made his support clear:

“... we shall certainly try to extend it to other areas wherever local initiative and facilities make this possible. I consider that this form of contact between P.Ws and British citizens who can tell them about their ordinary life and duties is probably one of the most useful types of re-education, and we shall simulate it as far as we can.”<sup>48</sup>

Pakenham expressed a desire to see the Experiment replicated and noted discussions to establish a similar Youth Camp in Western Command. Despite his enthusiasm, he acknowledged the significant obstacles that had to be overcome. The scheme required handpicked British and German staff, and retaining POWs one day per week for schooling added further expenses. Complaints about the unproductive use of POW labour at Radwinter limited its viability there and ultimately led to its relocation.

## RELOCATION TO TRUMPINGTON

Unfortunately, economic productivity outweighed the re-educational aims. In August 1947, the Youth Camp was relocated to Trumpington, near Cambridge. This was due to criticism of the ineffective and unproductive use of POW labour at Radwinter. A War Office official remarked: "The men have had nothing to do and no money in their pockets. They have moped about, and this move will be much better for them if only means keeping them occupied."<sup>49</sup>

Farmers had criticised the inconsistent labour output, owing to POW workers from Radwinter changing between shifts. Its placement also eroded efficiency, as it was ringed by other camps supplying agricultural labour. Yet relocation proved beneficial in promoting contact between local communities and POWs. Following the relocation to Trumpington, there was a clear effort to build new relationships. MacDonald strongly emphasised the importance of developing practical initiatives inspired by the Braintree Experiment, aimed at giving POWs direct, experiential insight and meaningful interaction with the local residents—which was particularly important due to the predominantly non-academic backgrounds of the POW population.<sup>50</sup>

Although meetings of the Braintree Experiment continued in Essex, Trumpington was too distant for POWs to regularly participate. Nevertheless, POW morale improved following the move. The proximity to Cambridge allowed them to take full advantage of the lifting of fraternisation restrictions. In his September 1947 report, MacDonald noted that: "The people of Cambridge have shown greater co-operation when approached with requests to help in constructive measures to occupy PWs leisure time".<sup>51</sup>

This included plans for a public meeting to form a committee to "promote and co-ordinate help for POWs within the educational sphere". Two sub-committees were envisaged—one focussing on academic education, arranging university courses and local talks, and another with focus on fostering civic education.<sup>52</sup> Plans were in place for the MP for Cambridge Borough to speak at the camp on parliamentary work, and the Workers' Educational Alliance had arranged courses in English literature, politics, and geology. These proved popular, with fifty applicants for twenty spots. To meet demand, a music course was also organised. In addition, several "offers of hospitality" had been received from local churches, including a POW club at St. Columba's Hall on Sundays.<sup>53</sup> Surveying these new opportunities, MacDonald judged the move to Trumpington positively, noting: "we have already much more activity than was possible in Radwinter and there is promise of a great deal more to come".<sup>54</sup> The Youth Camp was officially

disbanded in June 1948. The longevity of the Experiment following the move to Trumpington is currently unknown.

### **IMPACT AND LEGACY**

It was hoped that the POWs who participated in the Braintree Experiment would return home to Germany with a positive view of British society and its institutions. Writing to *The Times* in August 1947, Ariel Crittall—of the family associated with the Crittall Manufacturing Company—emphasised the perceived impact of the scheme:

“... the P.o.W.s gain enormous interest and satisfaction from this opportunity of seeing practical democracy at work, and in meeting the English supporters of the scheme. The outstandingly successful occasions were those devoted to local government, industrial methods, and British justice. As a number of prisoners were children [...] in 1933, this is in many cases their first contact with the ideas which we all take for granted – tolerance, humanity, and democratic method. Although there may probably be some mental “resistance,” the majority show an alert interest in their faces as they sit listening and learning of our ways. I should be pleased to send further details to any who may consider starting similar “experiments” in their locality.”<sup>55</sup>

Driberg similarly believed that the Experiment could foster a modest, but enduring influence on post-war Germany. By exposing POWs to the civic and social life of a small English town, he suggested that repatriated POWs might carry with them the positive essences of the political culture they had encountered:

“Braintree with a population of 15,000 souls has an ancient and proud tradition of civic consciousness and enlightened adventure. Some of the ancestors of its present citizens founded the town of Braintree in Massachusetts. In spirit, if not in name, a future Germany may have its own Braintrees.”<sup>56</sup>

The official patronage the Experiment enjoyed indicates that it was regarded as a meaningful complement to the formal re-education programme. Michael Balfour later argued that: “...the most important part of the re-education effort [...] was rebuilding the links between Germany and the Western World”, insisting that “... what did most to rebuild those links was personal contact.”<sup>57</sup> Driberg echoed this belief, maintaining that direct and practical exposure to democratic institutions, combined with informal discussion and social interaction, was essential if German POWs were to be convinced that British-style democracy was not only viable but also desirable. The POWD likewise recognised that socialisation

efforts—particularly among those passing through the Youth Camp—was central to successful re-education. In this respect, the Braintree Experiment reflected the official assumptions that ideological reorientation was best achieved through lived experience rather than didactic instruction alone.

While the pedagogical and social opportunities the Experiment offered were celebrated, whether it succeeded in encouraging POWs to internalise the essences of “the British way of life” is ultimately impossible to determine. Quantitative evidence linking participation to attitudinal change has not survived. Screening figures suggest that Nazi tendencies among Youth Camp POWs diminished over time, but the actual causation behind this shift in attitude remains uncertain. Writing in 1947, the sociologist Viola Klein observed the following: “Although the [Youth] camp is [...] no factory to turn out perfect little democrats on the conveyor belt, it leaves a lasting impression on most minds.”<sup>58</sup> Letters from repatriated POWs thanking Youth Camp staff suggest appreciation, but none refer directly to the Braintree Experiment. Given the limited number of participants, any assessment of its concrete impact must remain cautious. Henry Faulk later claimed the Experiment “was so successful that it was widely imitated throughout the camps in Britain”, but while such initiatives proliferated in different ways throughout many camps, the extent to which they mirrored the Braintree model is unclear.<sup>59</sup>

Although the concrete impact of the Experiment is difficult to measure, the organisers’ confidence is unmistakable. While the label ‘Experiment’ suggested a radical method, it was hardly original. As Susan Carruthers has claimed, British re-education ‘emerged from national and imperial traditions’, later applied to post-war occupations and counterinsurgencies.<sup>60</sup> Faith in the efficacy of Allied propaganda combined with pride in the methods of British schooling—particularly the traditions associated with Oxford and Cambridge – underpinned the conviction that the Germans could be reshaped through exposure to the ‘right’ influences. As Nicolas Pronay has noted, this reflected a broader cultural belief that: “... that the right kind of education could transform a boy born of the lower orders into a gentleman.”<sup>61</sup> This assumption is echoed in contemporary evaluations of the Braintree initiative, albeit, with an emphasis on the civilising potential of social interaction and civic encounters with civilians.

Re-education, including the Braintree Experiment, was never simply a humanitarian or pedagogical enterprise. It allowed British participants to showcase a carefully curated—often implicitly upper-middle-class—vision of “the British way of life”. According to its architects, this was not a rigid model but a lived experience rooted in civic engagement, mutual respect, and democratic

practices. It was not without flaws, but generally worked well. As Matthew Frank has argued, British responses to the German refugee crisis allowed the British to reaffirm their commitment to 'traditional British values' and show that six years of war had not left the country morally browbeaten.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, initiatives fostering contact between civilians and POWs, including the Braintree Experiment, offered a stage on which local communities could celebrate institutional stability and present themselves as exemplars of democratic virtue. In this sense, the Experiment spoke as much to British self-perception as to German reorientation. At the same time, it would be wrong to dismiss its humanitarian dimension. It facilitated meaningful encounters at a local level, rehumanising those long defined as enemies. For POWs whose formative years had unfolded within the Nazi system, it offered practical evidence of genuine interest in their welfare at a moment when their world had collapsed.

The repatriation of German POWs was completed in 1948. On 13 July, the *Daily Mirror* reported the departure of the *Biarritz*, the last ship carrying POWs home. The repatriates' experiences and thoughts about their time in Britain and 'the British way of life' were not surveyed in the article. Instead, the article drew attention to Bob, a three-year-old mongrel, who was pictured among onlookers at Harwich Port. Born in a POW camp near Colchester, Essex, Bob had become a constant companion, accompanying the POWs from camp to camp and remained by their side as they boarded the *Biarritz*.<sup>63</sup> As the ship departed: "Bob sat disconsolately on the quayside. His howl [...] the only emotion noticeable."<sup>64</sup> Bob's fate nearly led to tragedy. While at Camp #260 in Bury St Edmunds—one of the last operational POW camps in Britain—orders came that POW pets needed to either be rehomed or destroyed. Fifty-six dogs and cats were euthanised, with Bob scheduled to be among them. Fortunately, the British camp staff intervened and adopted him. Studies of the re-education efforts on POWs, and stories of war more generally, often neglect the contribution of animals.<sup>65</sup> The human-canine bond between the POWs and Bob highlights the informal, affective dimensions of re-education which was the focal point of the Braintree Experiment. Bob may have provided emotional support, contributing to their re-socialisation in ways other people never could. Future studies might extend beyond inter-human encounters to consider the role of animals in this regard.