CONTENTS

5 Overview
8 Recording Cultural Genocide and Killing Sites in Jewish Cemeteries
10 Methodology
16 Oświęcim
17 Early killings
21 German occupation
23 First acts of cultural genocide
26 The Jewish cemetery
32 Destruction of the cemetery
33 Documenting destruction
43 Bringing back names
46 Oświęcim Jewish cemetery map and database
48 Burial practices
52 Finding existing graves
54 Post war disturbance
55 Other features
59 Deportation of the Jewish population
61 Camp Judenfreidhof
68 Restoration efforts
74 References and sources
76 Acknowledgements
78 Author biographies

A digital version of this report is available to download from our project website at www.recordingculturalgenocide.com. Further printed copies of this report may also be requested from our website.
OVERVIEW

Oświęcim was one of the first towns in Poland to be invaded by the German army after the outbreak of World War II. By 3rd September 1939, despite attempts by the Polish army to slow the attack, the town was captured and by October it was incorporated into the Third Reich as part of the province of Katowice (Filip 2003: 150). These military operations and the presence of the German army meant that the Jewish population in Oświęcim – which constituted 9000 out of 13000 residents - was one of the first communities to experience cultural genocide and mass violence during World War II (Jakubowicz 2005: 17). The destruction of property, the closure of businesses and the limiting of religious practices was coupled with physical attacks against the Jewish population.

As a symbol of Jewish identity and culture in the town, Oświęcim’s Jewish cemetery was targetted by the occupying Nazi German forces, leading to the desecration and re-use of both the graves and the cemetery’s grounds. What began as vandalism, escalated to large-scale desecration of the dead and persecution of the living.

Via historical research, non-invasive archaeological survey and 3D visualisation, the “Recording Cultural Genocide and Killing Sites in Jewish Cemeteries” project has attempted to document the traces of cultural genocide and mass violence in Oświęcim. Via international and local cooperations, the team has also engaged in vital restoration and reconciliation work in order to engage with issues connected to racial hatred and xenophobia in the present.

This report outlines the research that was carried out in Oświęcim in 2016 and 2017 by the “Recording Cultural Genocide and Killing Sites in Jewish Cemeteries” project team.
[ABOVE] Oświęcim Jewish cemetery taken in 2016
[BELOW] Laser scanning of matzevot fragments.
© Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
[ABOVE] Location map of Oświęcim
© Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
Recording Cultural Genocide and Killing Sites in Jewish Cemeteries is a three-year research project, funded by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The project is a collaboration between Staffordshire University, The Matzevah Foundation and Fundacja Zapomniane. Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls leads the project, which started in 2016. A number of local partners and volunteers have also contributed to the project.

This project aims to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of cultural genocide and mass killings (using Jewish cemeteries desecrated by the Nazis as a pilot case study), directly tackling racism, xenophobia and hostility in the present.

[BELLOW] Students and volunteers recording matzevot fragments in Oświęcim Jewish cemetery. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
In August 2016, the project team undertook a two-week archaeological survey and restoration project in the grounds of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim. Archaeologists, historians, forensic scientists, engineers, geographers, games design specialist, experts in restoration and reconciliation, and volunteers sought to:

(1) Document the traces of cultural genocide and mass violence that still exist there today using a wide range of non-invasive survey methods

(2) Explore issues connected to neglect and intolerance in the present

(3) Clear and restore parts of the cemetery.

[ABOVE] Volunteers clearing Oświęcim Jewish cemetery.
© Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
METHODOLOGY

[ABOVE] Walkover survey facilitated the location of matzevah fragments, the identification of structural remains and the documentation of vegetation change that may indicate the presence of buried remains. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
A tailor-made application was developed which integrated a data-entry form with a Geographic Information System (GIS). The app provided the means to record a unique ID, the location (using GPS) and characteristics of each surviving matzevah or fragment. Alongside the motif, style and text; fields were created to document the condition and evidence of damage on the stones. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
[BELOW] Photo-realistic capture methods were also used to record the cemetery’s landscape in 3D and to create high-definition 3D models of individual matzevah. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
[ABOVE] Close-contact laser scanning by FARO was used to scan the discovered matzevah fragments. This enabled any evidence of damage to be recorded in 3D, it made inscriptions visible and it allowed matzevah to be virtually reconstructed. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
Total Station surveying was used to document the locations of matzevot and other surviving structural remains within the cemetery grounds. The Total Station uses a laser to measure distances and records the locations of features. This aids in the creation of an aerial map or plan of the site and allows us to compare the below ground evidence from the geophysical surveys, to the above ground visible features. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) is a type of geophysical survey that emits radar pulses into the ground to detect changes in subsurface material. Using this method, it was possible to search for buried evidence such as structural remains and graves within the cemetery. © Steven Reece, The Matzevah Foundation
OŚWIĘCIM

Oświęcim was one of the first towns in Poland to be invaded by the German army after the outbreak of World War II. By 3rd September 1939, despite attempts by the Polish army to slow the attack, the town had been captured and by October it was incorporated into the Third Reich as part of the province of Katowice (Filip 2003: 150). Aerial bombardments had already begun in the two days prior.

These military operations and the presence of the German army meant that the Jewish population in Oświęcim – which constituted 9000 out of 13000 residents - was one of the first communities to experience cultural genocide and mass violence during World War II (Jakubowicz 2005: 17). Likewise, the Polish population of the town faced persecution, deportation, and cultural genocide from the very first days of the conflict. By examining the history of Oświęcim – the town that would eventually become Auschwitz – it is possible to chart the origins and development of genocide.

[ABOVE] German soldiers stand next to the destroyed bridge over the River Sola following the invasion of Oświęcim. © Mirosław Ganobis
On the very first day of the German invasion of Oświęcim (known to the Jewish population as Oshpitzin), “the first soldiers…met some orthodox Jews fleeing down the street and shot three of them on the spot” (Jakubowicz 2005:45). They also rounded up Jews in the market square and murdered eight of them (Filip 2003: 152).

In the days that followed, Jewish men between 14 and 60 years of age were forced to undertake manual labour, which included the reconstruction of the bridge over the Sola River that had been destroyed by the Polish army in advance of the invasion. Jews were also forced to sweep the streets and work alongside other members of the community who were persecuted by the German army, such as Polish priests and intellectuals. Many townspeople were shot in this early period and others died as a result of the forced labour they were made to endure (Filip 2003: 162).
“the Rynek, which had once been the heart of so much life, had now become the center of death”

Moshe Weiss (1977: 155)
Map showing the location of the town of Oświęcim in relation to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
“Oshpitzin, a word that means guests. Oshpitzin was home for us, and into our home we welcomed all guests and extended our hospitality to all travellers. For me, the transformation of Oshpitzin to Auschwitz signified the end of home and of innocence”

Moshe Weiss (1977: 155)
GERMAN OCCUPATION

When the Germans invaded Oświęcim, they made claim to the land for two reasons: the first, that the town had formally been an important part of the Reich and the second, that the area represented a viable area in which a “political, economic, and cultural center of this New South Tyrol” could be created (Fishchel 2010 xxxvi; van Pelt and Dwork, 1996: 118). The name of the town was changed to Auschwitz. German place and street names replaced Polish names. The town was divided into two zones: the Old Reich and the Third Reich (Mark Bader interview).

For the local Jewish and Polish population of Oświęcim, these spatial and semantic metaphorically and physically separated them from their homeland.

[ABOVE] Street sign showing the German renamed street. the street, originally named ‘Stolarska Street’ was renamed to Tischlerstrasse when Oświęcim was incorporated into the Third Reich. (AJCF, 2016)
“When we reached Katowice we met a Jew from Oshpitzin, who imparted the horrible news that the Great Synagogue had been burned down. A special Gestapo unit had come to town for that purpose, surrounded the area so that no one would be able to extinguish the fire, poured gasoline and set the synagogue on fire. With this act the feeling was that Oshpitzin Jewry was doomed. This Jew also told me that the Germans took advantage of my absence from Oshpitzin in order to burn down the synagogue”

Former Oświęcim community leader Eliezer Schenker described the scene after the burning of the Great Synagogue (Schenker 1977: 173)
FIRST ACTS OF CULTURAL GENOCIDE

Immediately after Oświęcim was occupied by German forces, acts of cultural genocide and persecution were also committed against the local population. Meetings and gatherings of groups were banned (making it extremely difficult to attend synagogue). Jewish officials were immediately prevented from attending council meetings, and Jewish businesses were closed (Kuncewicz and Szyndler 2016). Whilst the former was a way of limiting religious freedoms and cultural expression, the latter resulted in poor economic and living conditions for the Jewish population. The closure of businesses that provided kosher food also prevented Jews from maintaining a kosher diet.

On the 29th and 30th November 1939, the Great Synagogue was burnt; an act that attacked the very heart of the community and further attacked Jewish culture by removing the ability of Jews to worship. The effect, Schenker (1997: 173) stated, was “with the burning of the synagogue, the Jewish ambience of the Jews’ Street ceased to exist”.

[ABOVE] KL Auschwitz prisoners removing the rubble of the Great Synagogue after it was burned by the Germans © Emilia Weźranowska.
The following month, Jews were forced to wear armbands bearing the Star of David. Jewish men were forced to cut their beards in public as a form of humiliation. Jewish women were forced to attend a “party” where pornographic films were made (Schenker 1977: 179). As the population of Oświęcim began to learn more about the episodes of mass violence in the surrounding cities, towns and villages, they became increasingly nervous about the prospect of further attacks on their town and their families. Attacks on public buildings continued and, by the end of the war, only one of eighteen synagogues in Oświęcim survived.

[BELLOW] A German policeman stands on Krakowska Street in front of a sign stating “Forbidden for Jews” © Państwowe Muzeum w Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu
“There were many Jews from Oshpitzin who went to live and work in other cities. However, in their old age, they always returned to their hometown. The saying was, ‘It is a good thing to live in a large city, but the best place for a Jew to die is Oshpitzin’ because the tzaddikim who were buried in Oshpitzin made the earth admat kodesh, holy ground”

Moshe Weiss describes the importance of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim to the Jewish community in Poland (1977: 134).
THE JEWISH CEMETERY

Some sources indicate that an “old” Jewish cemetery opened in Oświęcim c. 1588 but its location remains unknown. The Jewish cemetery that is marked in Oświęcim today was established at the turn of the nineteenth century. The “new” cemetery is located on what is now Dąbrowskiego Street. Burials were still being carried out there at the outbreak of the Second World War.

In Jewish culture, cemeteries lie at the very heart of the community and they are known as the House of the Living, due to the belief that the soul of a person is bound to their grave. Due to these beliefs, graves (and the ground above them) should also not be disturbed after burial and the maintenance of cemeteries is considered to be the responsibility of all Jewish communities. Visiting cemeteries also played an important role in remembering deceased relatives. As Jakubowitz described of Oświęcim cemetery,

“visiting the family graves in the cemetery before Rosch Haschanah is an important custom. Many people therefore visited the cemetery throughout the month of Elul before the New Year. And whole families gathered at the entrance begging for money with outstretched hands” (Jakubowicz 2005: 17-18).

In Oświęcim, many prominent rabbis were buried in the cemetery grounds, which elevated the status of the cemetery even further (Weiss 1977: 134).

A reconstructed matzevah in Oświęcim Jewish cemetery, which was vandalised by the Germans. © Staffordshire University
[ABOVE] Fragments of matzevot (tombstones) in Oświęcim Jewish cemetery. © Staffordshire University
“Sad and depressed, I went to the city hall to register. I saw sidewalks made of tombstones that had been taken from the cemetery. In the former “Enoch House [?]”, to which the city hall had been transferred yet in the days of the German occupation, I saw steps made from Jewish headstones. When I left city hall I saw piles and piles of headstones on the place where the Great Synagogue had once stood. I went down to the river, where I was shown headstones loaded on barges that the Nazis had prepared to send to Germany”

Eliezer Schenker describes witnessing the reuse of matzevah after the destruction of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim (Schenker 1977: 147-151)
[ABOVE] The ruins of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim © Ghetto Fighters’ House Photo Archive
[BELOW] The ruins of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim © Ghetto Fighters’ House Photo Archive
DESTRUCTION OF THE CEMETERY

As part of the attack on Jewish property, the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim was desecrated. Matzevot (tombstones) were broken, shot at and pushed over by the German occupiers. These sacred objects were then used as construction materials - to pave roads, line the river and repair buildings. To further increase the desecration and humiliation, the German overseers forced members of the Jewish community (who were by now forced labourers) to remove the matzevot themselves and to participate in these construction projects.

Although the exact date that this began is not known, the desecration of the cemetery certainly occurred throughout 1940 and continued throughout World War II. What began as ad hoc vandalism, escalated to large-scale destruction.

[BELOW] A damaged matzevah (tombstone) discovered during the 2016 archaeological and restoration project in Oświęcim. © Staffordshire University
The “Recording Cultural Genocide and Killing Sites in Jewish Cemeteries” project team sought to document and analyse the types of damage inflicted upon the cemetery in Oświęcim during the Holocaust and in its aftermath. Photography and close-contact laser scanning were used to record these material traces.

[BELLOW] Granite matzevot showing evidence of extreme force with a blunt object and {RIGHT] the reassembly of these fragments © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
Wenn Liebe könnte, wie der Tod,
und Tränen-Tote weckte
würde Dich gewiß nicht
die dunkle Erde decken.
Matzevot showing evidence of extreme force with blunt and sharp objects. © Staffordshire University
[ABOVE, TOP] Two matzevah fragments discovered in different parts of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim. The two fragments were scanned using a close-contact laser scanner [MIDDLE] and digitally reassembled [BOTTOM] © Staffordshire University
[ABOVE] Two laser scans of matzevah fragments discovered in different parts of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim and [BOTTOM] a digital reconstruction of the original matzevah. The damage that caused the matzevah to break it in two is clearly shown. © Staffordshire University

If you are viewing this report digitally, click on the images for an interactive view.
“The second path I took after my return home was to the cemetery, to visit my mother’s grave. The surrounding ancient wall had disappeared, and instead of my mother’s grave I found a giant crater caused by aerial bombardment. A terrible sadness came over me as I realized that I would never be able to visit my dear mother’s grave. A great number of the headstones, especially those of marble, had disappeared, and the remaining ones overturned, and some half buried under grass. I dug around and found pieces of the headstone of my great-grandfather, R’ Chaim Schenker, and those of his wife, Libale and of my grandmother Miriam Mali Hollander.”

Eliezer Schenker describes witnesses the aftermath of the destruction of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim (Schenker 1977: 147-151)
The limitations imposed upon the Jews meant that people from Oświęcim and beyond were unable to visit family graves which, as already noted, was an important part of Jewish cultural life. In the 1980s, survivors and ancestors of Oświęcim residents now living in Israel restored the cemetery and brought back hundreds of matzevah and fragments (Fellenbaum 2002). This resulted in the seemingly neat rows of graves and memorials that exist there today. The locations of the original graves were not known and so the matzevah were arbitrarily placed in rows. Broken fragments were used to cover the memorials. A fence was also erected.

This restoration work and a documentation project that followed (Proszyk 1997), resulted in the identification of the names of some of those people who were buried in the cemetery before World War II. However, in many cases, the extent of the destruction was so severe, that locating and recording the names on the matzevot was not possible. Likewise, given that the matzevot could not be put back in their original locations (because of the extent of the destruction), the inability to visit family graves is something that persisted for descendants in the decades that followed.

[BELOW] Matzevah fragments discovered during the 2016 archaeological and restoration project in Oświęcim. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
BRINGING BACK NAMES

Given the advances in new technology and recent restoration efforts by The Matzevah Foundation, the “Recording Cultural Genocide and Killing Sites in Jewish Cemeteries” project, attempted to tackle some of the long-lasting effects of cultural genocide. Building upon earlier documentation work, predominantly that undertaken by Jacek Proszyk (1997), the project team was able to:

● use new technologies to catalogue and record the positions of the matzevot that exist within the cemetery today, resulting in plans, photographs, laser scans and a cemetery database

● reveal names, text and motifs on matzevot or fragments, many of which are difficult or impossible to see with the naked eye

It is the intention that this map and database will assist people wishing to locate matzevah within the cemetery and researchers wishing to find out more about pre-war Jewish life in Oświęcim.

[BELOW] Photo-realistic capture models of a matzevah with difficult to read text. The image on the right shows the text clearly after image enhancement. © Staffordshire University. If you are viewing this report digitally, click on the image for an interactive view.
[ABOVE] Video file showing the capture of photo-realistic data in order to record the landscape of the cemetery and damaged matzevah. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
[BELOW] An interactive 3D model of a matzevah recorded using laser scanning technology. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University. If you are viewing this report digitally, click on the image for an interactive view.
### OŚWIĘCIM JEWISH CEMETERY MAP AND DATABASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>First name</th>
<th>Photo</th>
<th>Condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>WULKAN</td>
<td>Mosze</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>The matzevah is broken into several parts, one of which is on the floor. There has been an attempt to restore the matzevah, this is demonstrated by the metal wire wrapped around it, attaching it to the outer wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>ZIERER</td>
<td>Bejla</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>The top part of the matzevah is broken and lying in front of the bottom part which appears to be otherwise in tact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>216</td>
<td>HUTTERER</td>
<td>Dow Berisz</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>The matzevah appears to have significant projectile damage to the rear side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>398</td>
<td>LERMER</td>
<td>Bencyjon</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>At least 3 separate points of break, 2 have There appear to be at least three separate fragments that have been reconstructed. A large chunk remaining missing from the side of the matzevah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>704</td>
<td>SCHNITCER</td>
<td>Breindel</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>There is a high concentration of projectile damage to the rear of the matzevah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The complete database can be accessed by contacting the Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University via www.recordingculturalgenocide.com.
BURIAL PRACTICES

The last recorded burial in the cemetery took place in 1939 because the desecration of graves was also accompanied by legislation that prevented practicing Jewish customs, including religious ceremonies.

However, some testimonies suggest that burials in the cemetery did sometimes occur because of the actions of the Chevra Kaddisha - a pre-war Jewish organisation responsible for caring for and burying the dead in Oświęcim. As reported by Meir Shimon Geshuri (1977), in the Oświęcim Yizkor Book, despite the limitations placed upon the Jewish community, the members of the Chevra Kaddisha attempted to ensure that the deceased were buried according to Jewish law.

[ABOVE] A historic map of the cemetery in Oświęcim showing the area that it occupied before World War II © Urzad Gminy Oświęcimiu
“The members of the Chevra Kaddisha underwent severe trials during the Nazi occupation. They endangered themselves more than once in order to bury the murdered Jews of the city and surroundings. Some of the members used detectives’ methods to locate the dead, and immediately after receiving word they would effect the burial. Carrying out this task was extremely difficult and risky, and in fact some of the members themselves fell victim while performing this mitzvah. In spite of it all, they continued to do their work with courage and devotion until the deportation of all the Jews to Sosnowice”.

Meir Shimon Geshuri describes the attempts by members of the Chevra Kaddisha to continue to bury members of the Jewish community in Oświęcim (1977:100)
Having mapped the locations of the matzevot within the cemetery, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) was used in an attempt to relocate the original graves that they used to mark. Again, this was undertaken with a view to reversing some of the effects of the cultural genocide that had left them unmarked and to provide more information about the cemetery’s pre-war state for descendants, researchers and the general public. Using the GPR also offered the opportunity to identify any further construction works or disturbances associated with the various activities that have taken place within the cemetery’s grounds.

[ABOVE] The non-invasive geophysical survey is conducted at Oswiecim Jewish cemetery. © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
The cemetery was divided up into five survey areas in 2016 and a further area in 2017, based on the positions of obstacles e.g. vegetation, matzevot and topographic changes, and open spaces.

Areas 1 and 2 were located in the south-east portion of the cemetery in an area most densely populated with matzevot. These areas had a combined area of 80 x 60m.

Area 3 was positioned over a visible depression and area of vegetation change identified during the walkover survey. This grid measured 13 x 10m and was located south-west of the centre of the cemetery.

Area 4 was located in the north-west corner of the cemetery, close to an existed ohel (a structure indicating the grave of a prominent member of the Jewish community). This area contained some matzevot along its eastern edge but was characterised by an open area behind one of the existing memorials. This area was 47.5 x 30m, although many lines were shorter due to the presence of obstacles.

Area 5 was created in the north-east corner of the cemetery, adjacent to Area 4. This area also contained less matzevot than Areas 1 and 2, and was bounded by pathways to the south and west.
FINDING EXISTING GRAVES

In Areas 3, 4 and 5, it was possible to identify probable unmarked graves. These were consistent with single interments and were most likely pre-war graves. Comparison of the GPR data with the survey of above-ground matzevot revealed that, whilst some of matzevot matched the locations of the identified graves, most had been arbitrarily reinstated post-war. Hence, most graves in these areas remain unmarked.

[ABOVE] GPR results for Area 4 showing individual graves (in red) and a feature consistent with structural remains (within the black box) © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
In Area 4, a roughly square feature - measuring approximately 6.3 x 4.9m - was located during the GPR survey (marked by a black box in the image below). This feature is situated close to the existing ohel (burial structure) that exists in this region. Given the nature of the feature and its shape in plan, it is possible that this could be the foundations of another ohel which was demolished by the Nazis. It is known that another ohel did exist within the cemetery and this has been the subject of an ongoing search by Aleks Schwartz of Fundacja Zapomniane. However, structures were constructed by the Germans within the cemetery (see below) so this feature could also relate to this activity.

Although a number of other features that may be consistent with additional individual graves were identified across Areas 1 and 2, it is more difficult to confirm whether these relate to pre-war graves or later disturbances caused by the re-erection of matzevot after the war due to the presence of a large number of matzevot, tree roots and significant topographic change in these areas. The data for Areas 1 and 2 in particular was difficult to interpret due to noise caused by more recent disturbance, trees and other obstacles. Hence, the survey demonstrated that GPR is best suited for use in open spaces and that recent memorialisation activities, as well as the extent of vandalism, may mask the ability to identify buried remains.
[BELOW] GPR results for Area 5 showing two clusters of individual graves (within the red and yellow boxes) © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University

[RIGHT] GPR results for Areas 4 and 5 showing overlaid onto the Total Station survey results. This highlights the relationships between above-ground matzevot and below-ground features in these areas © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
“The town was one big construction pit. The prisoners were forced to work there. Digging, demolition, lugging bags of cement, you name it. Everything at a murderous pace. Everywhere you would see these SS men with dogs. My god, those prisoners were scarcely dressed in the winter. I can still distinctly remember the clapping of their clogs. In the evening they always had corpses with them lying on hand carts. They put tarps over them, but a foot or a hand would stick out here and there so you knew what was being transported. We had to get out of the road when they came”

(Mrs Kula in Citroen and Starzyńska 2012: 113-114).
Questions also remain regarding what happened to the bodies of those who died or those who were killed in Oświęcim. As already observed, deaths occurred from the very first day of the German occupation.

The living and working conditions in the region that the Jewish population of Oświęcim was forced to endure meant that deaths occurred regularly. Acts of brutality against them were also common. Witnesses report how people were mauled by dogs, shot and beaten in the town (Citroen and Starzyńska 2012: 113; Kunczewicz and Szyndler 2015). Mrs Kula, a non-Jewish resident of Oświęcim, described how the bodies of those who died were collected and taken to an unknown location (Citroen and Starzyńska 2012: 113-114). Once the Auschwitz camp complex was constructed, the bodies were likely taken there for burial or cremation. However, pre-Auschwitz, it is not clear what happened to the remains of the victims.

In other Jewish cemeteries across Poland, mass graves were dug for the bodies of Jews from the nearby town(s) who were murdered. It is unclear whether or not this occurred in Oświęcim. Research into this is ongoing.
“Jews had no place in what had become another ordinary town of the Third Reich”

(Jakubowicz 2005: 17)
In addition to the persecution of the Jewish population in the town, as soon as the Germans occupied Oświęcim, deportations began. Immediately after the renaming of the town, 1000 Jews were deported to a town near Lublin (Jakubowicz 2005: 17). Jews from one half of the town were also moved out of their homes into the other half in January 1940 to facilitate the construction of the Auschwitz camp complex (Jakubowicz 2005; 47). Jews from neighbouring towns and villages were also sent to Oświęcim to undertake forced labour or to make way for other construction projects in their home regions.

In March and April 1941, the remaining Jewish population of the town was deported to Będzin, Sosnowiec and Chrzanów (Fulbrook 2013).

During deportations to Sosnowiec, on the 25th April 1941, Jews were forced to gather in the main market square with their belongings and they were then transported on wagons. Photographs, taken by German informant Andreas Kasza, showed the scenes.
I went to the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim to say "Kaddish." To my dismay, when I arrived there, the cemetery was empty of all tombstones and in the middle was a dug reservoir holding water. I asked some people; "what happened here?" They told me that the Nazis took out all the tomb stones across to "Buna" or Monowice, or it was called Auschwitz III, and put them under a steel building. I went there and I was told they were under the building. I stood there and said "Kaddish" for all of them.

Jacob Hennenberg describes the scene upon returning to Oświęcim Jewish cemetery in 1945 (Private Archive of Jacob Hennenberg)
In November 1941, just a few months after the deportation of Oświęcim’s Jewish population, a labour camp was constructed in the northern part of the cemetery. The camp was named “Camp Judenfreidhof (Camp Jewish Cemetery)” but later it was renamed Camp II Buchenwald. The camp was one of several built to house I.G. Farben construction workers who were involved in building a new factory at Auschwitz (see footnote 107 in Setkiewicz 2006).

Although the camp was originally designed to house around 5000 workers, by August 1944 there were 7620 inmates (Setkiewicz 2006: 73-74). In October 1943, the camp was divided into two halves - Buchenwald Ost and Buchenwald West. In Buchenwald Ost, Poles, Ukrainians and other labourers from eastern Europe were housed and in Buchenwald West, Frenchmen, Flemings and Czechs (APK, Oświęcim branch, Bürgermeister der Stadt Auschwitz, 5/27). In 1944, 79% of the workers housed here were Polish or French.

Analysis of aerial images demonstrated a large water reservoir, two bunkers and camp fences were constructed on the cemetery grounds. Walkover survey and documentation using a Total Station revealed that the remnants of these features still survive in the landscape today.

It is not known exactly why the Nazis decided to construct the camp on the Jewish cemetery and very little is known about how the camp operated. However, the effect was the further desecration of the site and the graves it contained. Given the scale of the excavations needed to construct the reservoir and bunkers, human remains would have undoubtedly been disturbed. During the camp’s period of operation, matzevot continued to be removed for construction works.
[ABOVE] An aerial photograph showing part of Camp Judenfreidhof / Camp Buchenwald and the remains that exist within the terrain of the Jewish cemetery © NCAP
[ABOVE] A 3D visualisation of one of the bunkers belonging to Camp Judenfriedhof/Camp Buchenwald (© Staffordshire University). The bunker is situated in the northern part of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim and survives today as a reminder of one of the many forms of cultural genocide perpetrated within the cemetery grounds.
OTHER FEATURES

Walkover survey revealed the presence of seven drain covers in the cemetery grounds. Some of these drains may have been installed during World War II by the Germans during the camp’s period of operation. Others were likely added during the Communist era to service blocks of flats to the east of the cemetery. As they connect to further drains on Dąbrowska Street, these sewage lines bisect (and therefore disturbed) the entire width of the cemetery.

The existence of such features demonstrates the disregard for the cemetery across several periods of history and the additional disturbance that was caused to the site even after cultural genocide perpetrated by the Nazis had ended.

A roughly oval depression and associated vegetation change was also identified in Area 2 during the walkover survey phase of the project. Photogrammetry was undertaken to visualise this feature, which measured approximately 13 x 9m. Unfortunately, the presence of dense vegetation and large piles of rocks meant that GPR over the whole of this area was not possible. However, the survey lines that were completed confirmed an underlying disturbance. In the absence of further information, it is not possible to confirm what this feature is. It could relate to the desecration of the cemetery or it could be post-war.

[ABOVE] Photogrammetry of a depression and area of vegetation change identified during the walkover survey of Oświęcim Jewish cemetery. © Staffordshire University.
[ABOVE] A map created in 1944, showing the Buna-Monowitz complex, including its subcamps. Lager II (Buchenwald) was built on the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim (© Fritz Bauer Institute)
“TMF was asked to install a gravel path. With the Chief Rabbi of Poland’s permission and under supervision of his representative, we could dig the foundation for the pathway. While we were working, we encountered a moral dilemma in the form of two matzevah fragments. What should we do? Dig them up and move them or let them lay where they were?

The dilemma: How do we balance what is best for all versus individual needs? In other words, complete the task of installing the pathway or respect the dead and honour the Jewish law and tradition? How do I balance the demands of what we, as TMF, were requested to do – install a pathway, while honouring and dealing morally with the religious needs of the Jewish community in regards to the cemetery?

We had to find a way to balance the tension that existed ethically in the work and honour the request with which we were tasked. In consultation with other parties, we determined to leave the matzevot where they were lying and direct the path around them.”

Steven D. Reece, The Matzevah Foundation, 2017
[PHOTOS] Volunteers working to clear, document and restore Oświęcim Jewish cemetery © Steven Reece (this page) and Centre of Archaeology (right)
“This project is important for today’s society, because history needs to be remembered and not forgotten. How can change happen in the future if we don’t teach/learn about things that happened in the past?”

Volunteer, 2017

“Through this work we seek to preserve and bring honour to the Jewish heritage of Oświęcim.

Our work included clearing the cemetery of overgrowth, placing matzevot without bases in concrete stands, and building a path from the front to the back of the cemetery. The path ended up being symbolic of the work we do in Jewish cemeteries. We start out with a straight line in mind. Along the way it is not uncommon to run into things that weren’t part of the original plan. With the cooperation of our partners (Staffordshire University, Rabbinical Commission, and Fundacja Zapomniane) a solution is found as these things are brought to the light. One of our partners, Aleks, called it the Path of Awareness. A very fitting name!

Partnership elevates us all and makes us all better.”

JoAnn Siegienski, The Matzovah Foundation, 2017
[PHOTOS] Volunteers working to clear, document and restore Oświęcim Jewish cemetery © Steven Reece, the Matzevah Foundation and Centre of Archaeology
The project in Oświęcim bought together experts and volunteers from all over the world. Working together, these participants helped to clean, document and restore the cemetery. They also participated in discussion groups, considering the causes and consequences of racial hatred and genocide. The project team also worked with local and international groups to create sustainable strategies for Holocaust education and to develop further opportunities for this kind of collaboration in the future.

“We are seeing transformation – cemeteries and communities are being set right and rectified – literally being healed, renewed and honoured.”

Steven D. Reece, The Matzevah Foundation, 2017
“This project is relevant for today as it tackles history and aims to form a remembrance of the past and what has happened... It brings communities together and shows a common idea - that this needs to be remembered and recorded for history so that this lesson can be passed down from generation to generation”

Volunteer, 2017
REFERENCES AND SOURCES


Private Archive of Jacob Hennenberg.


USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, Interview with Mark Bader. Interview 10586, 1996.


Source material was also consulted within the archives of: the Ghetto Fighters’ House, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Wiener Library, Yad Vashem, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Państwowe Muzeum w Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, Urzad Gminy Oświęcimiu, Fritz Bauer Institute and Centrum Żydowskie w Oświęcimiu.
Illustrations by Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University, (2017).

Photographs by Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University, (2017) and Steven Reece of the Matzevah Foundation [2017]

Report compiled by Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls, and edited by Czelsie Weston and Kevin Colls.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork in Oświęcim was supported by:

[Images of logos for participating organizations]

Centrum Żydowskie w Oświęcimiu (Auschwitz Jewish Center)
International Youth Meeting House in Oświęcim/Auschwitz
Action Reconciliation Service for Peace in Berlin
Topf & Söhne – Die Ofenbauer site of Auschwitz
The Mayor’s Office in Oświęcim and residents of the town

The graphics were provided by Mick Britton (laser scanning), Richard Harper and James Butcher (photogrammetry)

The project received funding from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) under Grant No. 2016-597.
Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls is a Professor of Conflict Archaeology and Genocide Investigation, and co-founder and Research Lead of the Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University. Her research focuses on the application of novel forensic and archaeological techniques to the investigation of the Holocaust and historic crimes. In 2016, she was awarded the European Archaeological Heritage Prize for her work in this area. Professor Sturdy Colls has carried out the first forensic archaeological investigation at Treblinka extermination and labour camps, and co-curated the “Finding Treblinka” exhibition on this subject. She has also carried out extensive investigations at other Holocaust sites in Poland, Serbia, Germany and the Channel Islands. In 2016, she became a Principal Investigator for two major research projects focused on Holocaust landscapes: Integrating Campscapes (iC-ACCESS) project (funded by HERA) and “Recording Cultural and Physical Genocide in Jewish Cemeteries” (funded by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance). Professor Sturdy Colls is also a member of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation Education Advisory Group, appointed by the UK Government and a consultant forensic archaeologist, working with Police forces throughout the United Kingdom. She is a Member of the UK Forensic Archaeology Expert Panel and a committee member of the IfA Forensic Archaeology Special Interest Group. She is the author of a number of publications focusing on forensic and conflict archaeology, including three monographs: Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions; Forensic Approaches to Buried Remains and the Handbook of Missing Persons.