

Report on Alderney Channel Islands Nazi labour camps confirms perpetrators not tried because of “a succession of cover-ups”

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The official UK government review into deaths on the Channel Island of Alderney under Nazi occupation revealed a death toll at least double the official figure accepted after liberation.

Reporting last month, the Alderney Expert Review Panel concluded the perpetrators had not been tried because of “a succession of cover-ups.”

The panel was convened under Lord Eric Pickles, the Conservative government’s Special Envoy on Post Holocaust Issues. It consisted of 14 academics from the UK, France, Germany, Portugal and Canada.

Between 1940 and 1945 the Channel Islands—British territories near the French coast—were under Nazi occupation. There were four labour camps on Alderney. The panel calculates that a minimum of between 7,608 and 7,812 people were transported there as forced and slave labour to construct its “Atlantic Wall” defence fortifications.

They included French Jews, German and Spanish political prisoners, prisoners of war (PoWs) and civilians from Eastern Europe, north Africans, and forced labour from across the Channel Islands.

On liberation, the British military suggested 389 had died in the Alderney camps. The panel now places the total death toll between 641 and 1,027 victims, with a likely upper limit of 1,134. In addition, at least 97 other deaths and one disappearance are known to have occurred during the transport of prisoners.

The panel’s historical findings are being used as a political damage limitation exercise. The 93 page report, said Pickle, was “bring[ing] an end to conspiracies and misinformation”. He said there was no proof of an extermination centre on the island, and no “mini-Auschwitz,” as had sometimes been suggested. The number of people who died remains contested.

What is incontestable is that confirmed deaths are significantly higher than the deliberate underestimates which fuelled mistrust and demand for investigations in the first place.

Critics note that the Alderney Expert Review Panel has avoided testamentary evidence from survivors and local witnesses suggesting higher numbers of transported labourers and dead.

The X/Twitter account Alderney Truthseeker—which is dedicated to “seeking the truth in Alderney however uncomfortable over the Nazi occupation and the fate of thousands of Slave workers who died here. NOT HUNDREDS”—continues to challenge the official numbers. It notes that an overall total of 7,600 transported labourers cannot be reconciled with witness statements suggesting 7,000 in the first four months of 1942 alone.

The panel did use witness statements for descriptions of conditions. Their finding regarding numbers, however, was based on documentary

evidence critics say was compromised and deliberately inaccurate.

The panel has also been accused of partiality over inclusion of records, as the death toll excludes prisoners sent from Alderney to be exterminated in Germany. The deaths in transit do not include the up to 250 French Jews killed when the *Minotaure*, carrying them to France, was torpedoed by a Canadian vessel, although this incident is mentioned in the report.

The Channel Islands are Crown Dependencies, self-governing possessions for which the state is responsible although not part of the United Kingdom. Their independent taxation status makes the Crown Dependencies valuable offshore financial centres.

In June 1940, the British government decided not to defend the Channel Islands, demilitarising them and leaving them “an open town.” The local governments (the States) remained in place under the occupation. More than half the population was employed by the Nazis.

The extent of collaboration is still bitterly disputed. The official historian of the occupation, commissioned by the governments of Jersey and Guernsey, claimed they did “much right in circumstances of the greatest possible difficulty.” A later historian, by contrast, titled one chapter, “Resistance? What Resistance?”

Stalinist Norman Le Brocq, active in the Jersey resistance, accused local police and officials of collaborating by reporting the island’s Jews to the Nazis, resulting in many being sent to German concentration camps. Some collaborating officials were subsequently honoured by the British government.

The Nazis built four labour camps on Alderney in 1941. Borkum, Helgoland, Norderney and Sylt began operation in 1942, initially under the control of the military engineering group Organisation Todt (OT). There were nine smaller camps across a total of 20 sites.

Borkum and Helgoland were called “volunteer” labour camps, but forced labour was used. Sylt and Norderney were concentration camps, transferred to the Waffen-SS in 1943 as subcamps of Neuengamme, near Hamburg, and using slave labour.

The labour camps included conscripted or forced workers from the Channel Islands. The panel assert that “only those from Jersey were conscripted,” while reporting anecdotal evidence of ostensibly voluntary workers from Guernsey having “no choice in being sent to Alderney.” This seems to have been the case where they were otherwise unemployed or were deemed guilty of an offence against the occupiers.

The review confirms the complicity of the States on Alderney. Alderney’s population had mostly left, but 429 Channel Islanders were employed there during the occupation, usually in small numbers

at any one time and with a high turnover, indicating bad conditions. More than three quarters were from Guernsey, and almost half were employed by the States. This had already been uncovered in 2022 by Alderney truthseeker. The account noted that the same archival source also referred to the transfer of “13,000 workers, Spaniards, Algerians, Moroccans etc,” contradicting the panel’s figures.

Norderney initially housed voluntary labourers from France, Belgium and Portugal before becoming an Organisation Todt forced labour camp for people from around 30 countries. Under SS command, it contained a Jewish camp. Sylt held Jewish forced labourers, and was used as a punishment camp for the other camps.

The majority of forced labourers, and most of the dead, came from the Soviet Union and Poland, with civilians and PoWs from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Georgia.

Pickles wanted the panel to address any “exaggeration” of the number of deaths and suggestions of an extermination camp on Alderney, stating that it was “as much of a Holocaust distortion to exaggerate the number of deaths as it is to underplay the numbers.” The panel examined whether Alderney constituted a site of “extermination through labour,” a formula reflecting a 1942 agreement for extraditing prisoners to concentration camps.

The absence of a formal plan of working prisoners to death has been used to undermine the phrase, although the panel admit this does not mean forced labourers were not worked to death: “There was a widespread common understanding... that the deaths of large numbers of certain categories of workers due to gruelling working conditions were not a problem. Nevertheless, this is different from deliberately planning to kill as many forced labourers as possible through work.”

Alderney demonstrates the interaction of the Holocaust extermination of European Jewry, at Sylt and in the Norderney enclosure, with the wider Nazi treatment of forced labour. SS use of concentration camp labour was intended to fill gaps caused by the death rate of civilian forced labourers. Norderney’s mortality rate was higher under the Organisation Todt than under SS administration.

The panel notes similarly terrible conditions in Sylt, Norderney and Helgoland. A commission reportedly visited Norderney and Helgoland in late 1942 following reports of its unsanitary conditions and high death rate.

Under the SS, Sylt’s operation resembled European camps, with labourers beaten, shot “trying to escape,” and starved by guards stealing their rations. Labourers were exposed to the weather, disease and vermin. The report includes appalling eyewitness accounts of the treatment of prisoners.

Between August and October 1943, 594 French Jews were sent to Norderney camp. They were mostly spouses of “Aryan” wives, so technically non-deportable to the extermination camps. They were sent to the labour camps because they were Jewish. Although Alderney had no extermination camps, “Jewish forced labourers only had the right to live as long as their labour could be exploited,” the panel state. They conclude correctly that “The Holocaust... is part of Alderney’s history.”

The review was initially to determine the numbers sent to Alderney and how many died there. Its remit was later expanded to investigate why the perpetrators were not tried by Britain for their war crimes.

The panel noted “very serious” efforts to investigate the crimes on Alderney after the war. Britain signed the Moscow Declaration of 1 November 1943, which committed to two levels of trial for Nazi war criminals. “Major war criminals” would be tried at international tribunal, while others were to be returned for trial by national courts at

the scene of their crimes on the basis of “territoriality.” This was the original intention for Alderney.

Captain Theodore Pantcheff conducted an immediate investigation at the end of the war, taking witness statements from victims and Nazi officers held as PoWs. However, the British Foreign Office decided unilaterally in the summer of 1945 to expand the “territoriality” principle to the victims’ nationality. As most Alderney victims were Soviet citizens, the British government handed the case to the USSR, which did not proceed with it.

Professor Anthony Glees—a professor of politics and Director of the Centre for Security and Intelligence Studies at University of Buckingham—was commissioned to investigate the failure to prosecute by the British. He described a general lack of enthusiasm for organising a trial on Alderney conducted by legal representatives for “Russians, Soviet citizens, Poles, 700 Jews from France, red Spaniards who fought against Franco, and people from North Africa.”

What Glees calls the “scarcely understandable” British decision not to prosecute was based on a trade-off. Handing over the Alderney files was designed to ensure the British courts would be handed the files on the Nazis who murdered 50 Allied PoWs who escaped from Stalag Luft III (now in Poland).

In 1947, the French government sought information with the intention of prosecuting those responsible for the treatment of French Jews on Alderney. The British government said all its papers had been sent to Russia, although it still held the official Pantcheff report. It showed little interest in pursuing the truth. Sylt deputy commandant, long-serving SS officer Kurt Klebeck, was declared officially dead even though he was active as president of his local football club until his retirement in 1975.

Glees has called for the government to apologise for covering up having handed the case to the Russians, for denying knowledge of the case when the French asked about it, and for the fact that it is “only through Lord Pickles’s review that we’ve discovered the Russians did nothing with it.”

This is evidently being weaponised for current anti-Russian propaganda purposes, with Glees concluding the Soviet Union was “thus responsible for the failure to bring the perpetrators to justice”, supposedly “causing much anger among members of the British government.”



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