

Breaking glass or building bridges?

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 14 November 2018

There can't be many people or communities who haven't been touched one way or another by the commemorative events of this past Remembrance Weekend. Perhaps you had family who fought or fell in that "War to end all wars", as it was called without irony. But it was not to be so. This weekend was also the 80th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, when many thousands of Jewish homes and businesses in Nazi Germany had windows broken, and hundreds of synagogues were damaged or destroyed. That pogrom marked when antisemitism crossed the line from mere discrimination against Jews, to state-sponsored violence, and the murder that culminated in the Holocaust.

We associate the Holocaust with the Second World War, but its roots lie in the First, in the defeat of Germany, and the Nazis' search for a scapegoat. We need to remember, and to try to understand, in order to avoid making the same mistakes again. One of the most frightening things I've recently read is an article by a teacher reporting that colleagues routinely make excuses for Hitler "in the interests of balance"! That's why the First Minister's visit to Auschwitz with 200 children from all over Scotland was so important – because seeing is so much more than hearing!

We need to learn these brutal lessons from the past so we can create communities that foster understanding and respect by sharing our stories, passing on our memories, and contributing our collective wisdom across the generations, not by denying or excusing the past. Building and maintaining a peaceful society means "connecting the generations" – the theme of this Interfaith Week – as well as connecting communities.

Yesterday someone told me that her local Scouts planted Stars of David in their field of remembrance in recognition of Jewish people who fought and died in the war. As she said, "it's only a small gesture, but in today's world, I'm grateful for any act that builds bridges."