



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/144147/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Moore, B. (2018) Helen Fry. The London Cage: The Secret History of Britain's World War II Interrogation Centre. *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (3). pp. 650-651. ISSN: 0021-9371

<https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2018.63>

This article has been published in a revised form in *Journal of British Studies* [<https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2018.63>]. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © The North American Conference on British Studies 2018.

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Helen Fry, *The London Cage. The Secret History of Britain's World War II Interrogation Centre* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017) HB pp. ix + 244 ISBN 978 0300 221930

The secrecy surrounding what took place at the London Cage, the British government's intelligence gathering centre in Kensington Palace Gardens during the Second World War has become something of a *cause célèbre* within the field of intelligence history. In this new book, Helen Fry makes use of the material now available to shed further light on what was hitherto only suspected about what took place in this most secretive of establishments. She begins her story by retelling the tale of its former director Colonel Alexander Scotland and how he attempted to publish his memoirs in the mid-1950s, much to the horror of security services. While a heavily redacted version did appear in 1957, it was commonly supposed that much detail had been suppressed. At the time, the reasons for this suppression appeared to be the possibility that British might have been deemed to have breached the terms of the Geneva Convention, something which they had been very keen to use as evidence against the Nazis, and also because the burgeoning Cold War meant that interrogation techniques had to remain a closely guarded secret.

Perhaps because his memoirs were not allowed to see the light of day in their original form, this created the basis for all manner of conspiracy theories about what actually had taken place in the London Cage. In essence this is what the author attempts to outline, providing a wealth of detail on the building, on the interrogators, on some of its more famous inmates, and perhaps more pertinently still on the methods used by Col Scotland and his men in attempting to extract information from captured axis prisoners. This includes discussions on the use of violence, of sensory deprivation, of humiliation, and also the use of so-called truth drugs. While this book provides additional evidence from Scotland's own writings, there is little here that was not already suspected by those who had studied British intelligence gathering methods during and after the Second World War. Scotland always denied that any sadistic practices were carried out in the London Cage, but he was also on record as saying that some things were done that were mentally just as cruel, with prisoners forced to strip naked and exercise, or forced to stand for hours at a time.

Included in the second half of the book is a series of case studies on the intelligence gathering carried out by the London Cage, including the abortive German breakout from the prisoner of war camp at Devizes in the last days of 1944 and the postwar investigation of German war crimes against British prisoners of war, including Fritz Knöchlein the so-called 'butcher of Le Paradis' and the murder of 50 Allied prisoners after the mass escape attempt from Stalag Luft III (Sagan). In her conclusions, the author places the London Cage within the wider context of other British military intelligence establishments. She notes that there were other examples of the War Office taking disciplinary action against officers accused of brutality against prisoners, but that no such enquiry was ever mounted into the London Cage itself. This remained, and remains, the attitude of the British government unwilling to open what might become a Pandora's box which would seek to uncover the work of interrogators not just in the Second World War but in subsequent conflicts as well.

In sum, this book undoubtedly brings together a great deal of material related to the London Cage, largely culled from Scotland's own writings and declassified material housed at the National Archives in London. There are, however, some surprising omissions in what purports to be a comprehensive survey. The reader will look in vain for references to most of the standard texts on British intelligence during the Second World War, although the author condemns these same texts for not giving proper credit to the information gathered by Scotland and his men (p.47). There are also some rather vague statements in the book which probably also needed to be more carefully contextualised. For example, the statement that 'in 1944 there were around 300,000 German POWs in England' could have been more accurately rendered if attributed to December of that year, as it was only after the Normandy landings that it became imperative to evacuate Germans from forward areas. The fact that Scotland himself spent three years in the German colonial army between 1904-1907, exactly at the time of the Herero Wars, goes all-but unremarked. It is seen to establish his credentials as a German-speaker and someone who understood the German military mind, but there is no mention that he might have been an eye-witness, or even complicit in one of the major genocides of the twentieth century. There is no doubt that this book would also have been improved by connecting its story directly to the existing scholarly literature on the subject, and it would certainly have been more useful to researchers if the references to material in the National Archives had provided more than just the relevant file numbers.

Bob Moore

Sheffield