A Paper Monument: Introduction

Henning Borggräfe,
Christian Höschler,
Isabel Panek

Millions of people were deported and murdered under the Nazi dictatorship from 1933 to 1945 in Germany and the territories it occupied during World War II. The victims included Jews, Sinti and Roma people, political opponents, people with disabilities, homosexuals, social outsiders, foreign forced laborers and many others. Soon after the war ended, the world's most comprehensive collection of documents on victims of Nazi crimes was assembled in Arolsen with the aim of finding missing persons and clarifying their fate. Kilometer upon kilometer of files, index cards and lists are stored next to each other on shelves – millions of documents about Holocaust victims and concentration camp prisoners, foreign forced laborers and survivors. There are more than 50 million cards in the *Central Name Index* alone, and over three million case files hold correspondence on the fates of individual victims of Nazi persecution. The collections of the *Arolsen Archives*, which were created for the *International Tracing Service* (ITS) and have grown through decades of tracing and documentation work, are a unique place of remembrance: a *paper monument*.

The exhibition on the history of the *Arolsen Archives* focuses on this paper in order to address three central perspectives spanning the systematic and chronological narrative. *First*, the documents represent the almost unimaginable scale of the Nazis' crimes while making them tangible at the same time – through countless individual stories of persecution, deportation and murder, but also survival, reunions and new beginnings. For many relatives of the victims, this paper stands for memory. It holds more than "just" information – it is often the last trace of a lost loved one's life.

Second, the documents testify to the many different consequences and effects of Nazi crimes on individuals and society alike: living with uncertainty or the loss of family, searching for a new home, suffering from serious injuries and existential crises, and experiencing support and recognition but also ongoing exclusion. Tracing and documentation was one of the areas in which Nazi crimes were dealt with after 1945. This played out in conflicts between the Allies and Ger-

mans and in fierce battles over legal punishment and compensations in the first decades after the war, but also in new social efforts to come to terms with the past and in waves of compensation since the 1980s.

The *third* perspective reveals the profound changes in how the documents have been handled. Over the decades, documents that had once been used for Nazi persecution and then for Allied aid became the everyday working materials of the ITS, which adapted them in a variety of ways – by specially sorting and labeling them, for example. But these documents have also become increasingly valuable to memory culture. This can be seen in the growing interest of memorial initiatives, scholars and journalists, as well as in the new status that was conferred on this documentary heritage when the collections were added to the UNESCO Memory of the World register in 2013. The actual process of working with the documents and questions of access are therefore an important part of the story.

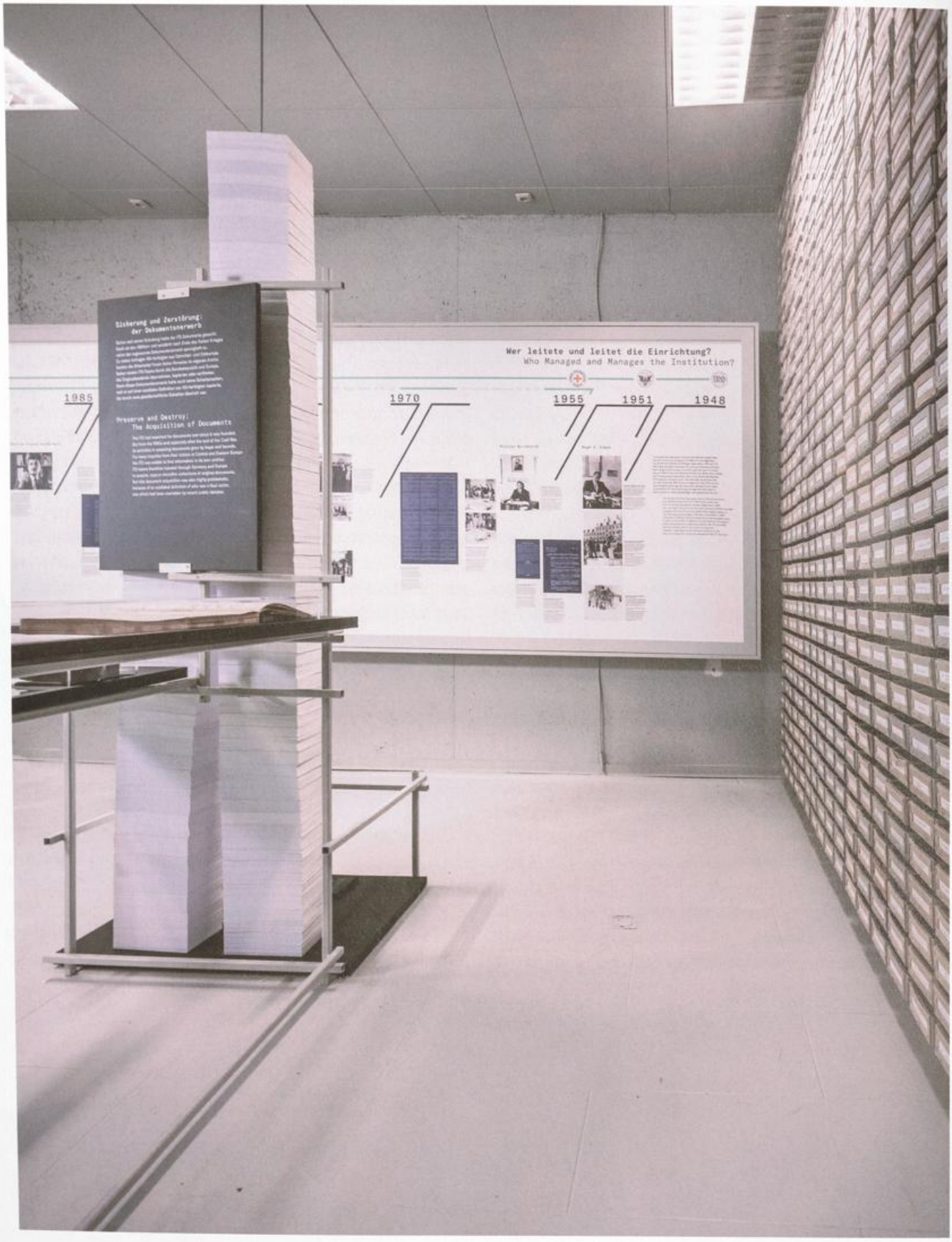
This examination of the history of the *Arolsen Archives* not only explains how the search for missing persons and clarification of their fate developed over time, leading to the creation of this unique *paper monument*, it also illuminates the changing approaches to dealing with historical evidence and the victims of Nazi crimes.

Early Tracing and Documentation

After the end of World War II, the Allies faced a humanitarian crisis on a historically unprecedented scale. In the wake of the Nazis' crimes, millions of people were missing – both by family members and friends as well as the governments of different countries. Searching for these missing people and clarifying their fate became an important task, but one that was strictly divided along the lines of friend and foe. Separate tracing structures were established for German war victims, prisoners of war, refugees and expellees, while the Allies focused on victims of Nazi persecution. Although there were historical forerunners to these activities – such as the tracing programs developed by the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) in Geneva during World War I which primarily dealt with prisoners of war – the process started off in fits and starts. In the first postwar years a variety of organizations carried out tracing, information and documentation activities in parallel and in different ways.

Some of the earliest efforts were made by survivors themselves, many of whom were neither silent nor passive after 1945. For example, prisoners liberated from Dachau concentration camp founded the *International Information Office* (IIO). The IIO issued certificates of imprisonment based on concentration camp documents that the prisoners themselves had saved shortly before liberation. These certificates enabled survivors and those left behind to receive welfare benefits, such as food and clothing. IIO employees also wrote one of the first histories of Dachau concentration camp and contributed to a memorial book documenting the names of the dead. For employees such as Walter Cieślik, the head of the IIO who had been a political prisoner himself, this work was an expression of solidarity with other former prisoners and their families. The activities of the survivors were limited, however; the US Military Government put restrictions on the IIO, which was disbanded in 1946.

Previously established aid organizations also participated in the search for missing persons. One example was the *American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* (AJDC), a Jewish aid organization that had been founded in 1914. Unlike the IIO in Dachau, the work of the AJDC was not locally limited. The organization had


Sicherung und Zerstörung:
der Dokumentenerwerb
Preserve and Destroy:
The Acquisition of Documents
Wer leitete und leitet die Einrichtung?
Who Managed and Manages the Institution?
1985
1970
1955
1951
1948

tracing offices all over Europe and overseas which exchanged information about Holocaust victims and survivors in order to resolve tracing cases internationally. Although the AJDC played an important role in early tracing activities, the organization did not follow a standardized process. Individual AJDC offices were involved to varying degrees and developed their own tracing methods, something that was not always conducive to efficiency. Nonetheless, the AJDC often managed to reunite missing persons and secure important documents as evidence.

Besides these aid organizations and smaller survivor initiatives, the Allies had begun developing ideas for a standardized tracing system as early as 1943. The first major institution to emerge in the autumn of 1945 was the *Central Tracing Bureau* (CTB) under the direction of the *United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (UNRRA), the biggest and most important aid organization in the postwar period. The CTB was initially based in Frankfurt-Höchst in occupied Germany. It moved to Arolsen in Northern Hesse in early 1946, primarily due to the town's favorable location between the four occupation zones and its relatively intact infrastructure. The tracing bureau quickly took over several buildings there, including the old and new palaces and the barracks previously used by the SS.

Parallel to the CTB in Arolsen, the Allies ran individual zonal tracing bureaus in their respective occupation zones. One of their tasks was to secure and collect documents, and at the end of 1945 they began sending orders and instructions to German authorities as part of a large-scale foreigner tracing campaign. Documents from the concentration camps were an important basis for tracing individuals and clarifying their fate, as were lists from the police, judiciary, municipal administrations and other offices. The zonal tracing bureaus sometimes communicated through the CTB, but they were often also in direct contact with numerous national tracing offices. The activities of the CTB in Arolsen were largely limited to the overall coordination of tracing activities and the circulation of inquiries. As a result, while the CTB represented a large-scale tracing structure, it was at the same time a rather decentralized network with long lines of communication which did not always function efficiently.

UNRRA had a time-limited mandate, and when it wrapped up most of its work in Europe in mid-1947, a question mark hung over the future of the tracing service in Arolsen. It was clear to everyone involved, however, that the search for missing persons would continue for many more years. The CTB was ultimately taken over by the *International Refugee Organization* (IRO) – the successor to UNRRA at the United Nations – and it was renamed in early 1948: from that point on the institution was known as the ITS, the *International Tracing Service*. This also heralded a period of reorganization. The zonal tracing bureaus were closed one by one, and their documents and employees were moved to Arolsen. This laid the foundation for centralized tracing activities and for today's archive. One defining feature of this centralization was that numerous documents from other tracing offices, including the IIO at Dachau and papers from AJDC offices, were also transferred to Arolsen.

In the late 1940s, the still young institution began to professionalize and expand its work. The first director of the ITS, Maurice Thudicum from Switzerland, was a tracing expert who had previously led tracing activities conducted by the *Red Cross* in Geneva. In terms of international connections, too, an important change took place – though it actually hindered the organization's tracing work: due to its growing conflict with the Western powers, the Soviet Union no longer

participated in the ITS. This brought an end to the exchange of inquiries and documents between East and West.

Meanwhile, the number of ITS employees rose rapidly, from 80 people in 1945 to 1,758 just four years later. The first employees came from 20 different countries and comprised Allied military personnel and civilians as well as many Displaced Persons (DPs), people who had been liberated from the camps and from forced labor and either wanted to return to their countries of origin or find a new home elsewhere. At the ITS, these DPs were housed in their own camp in the former barracks in Arolsen. The ITS soon began employing local Germans as well, which led to tension since some of the men had previously been active in the SS or other Nazi organizations. When the employees' backgrounds were reviewed in the early 1950s, at least 45 people were dismissed. After most of the DPs emigrated in the 1950s, they were succeeded by younger locals from different professions who lacked the necessary historical and archival knowledge. However, through decades of specialized work at the ITS, they became extremely knowledgeable about specific parts of the ITS archive.

The first half of the 1950s brought some important organizational changes as well. When the IRO ended its work in 1951, the leadership of the ITS temporarily passed to the *Allied High Commission for Occupied Germany* (HICOG). Under its representative Hugh G. Elbot, now head of the ITS, even stronger connections were established with the West (in a speech, Elbot referred to the ITS as a "shop window of democracy"). At the same time, many activities were stopped and the staff was reduced dramatically. From this point on, the tracing service acted mainly as an information office.

Even the HICOG leadership was only a temporary solution, however, because HICOG itself was dissolved when the occupation period ended. The idea of handing over the collections to the Germans was viewed critically by many survivors' associations as well as Elbot himself. Eventually the ICRC put itself forward as a neutral organization with the relevant experience to manage the ITS. With the signing of the Bonn Agreements in 1955 by German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, ICRC President Paul Ruegger and representatives of Western states, the ICRC took over the ITS and appointed its directors from then on. Additionally, an *International Commission* was formed to act as a supervisory body and guarantee the protection of the collections. The core mission of the ITS, as defined by the Bonn Agreements, was to collect, organize, and safeguard the documents, as well as make them accessible. This established an institutional framework that would remain in place until 2012.

Tracing Methods and Information

Tracing methods and the information provided by the ITS have changed dramatically over the decades. The institution initially focused on searching for missing children, adolescents and adults. From the mid-1950s, however, the ITS also became a central point of contact for authorities, courts and lawyers representing victims of Nazi persecution who needed documentary evidence mainly for compensation claims, but also for immigration proceedings, naturalization procedures and pension applications.

In its daily work, the ITS was able to draw partially on knowledge and techniques that had previously been created in Geneva. At the same time, however, new processes had to be developed to cope with the scale of the Nazis' crimes. In the immediate postwar period, tracing victims of Nazi persecution involved the

following steps: the creation of a *Central Name Index* (CNI) and the search for information in the archived documents on Nazi crimes, actively searching in the field, contacting local authorities and, finally, *mass tracing* through the media.

The CTB had started creating the name index in the autumn of 1945. Employees transferred all important information from search inquiries to index cards, especially personal details and references to an individual's path of persecution. When new cards were filed in the index, inquiry cards from people seeking missing persons and information about the persons being sought would ideally collide – a *meeting of cards* that would enable the tracing office to bring the two parties together. This happened in very few cases, however, because many missing persons had never submitted an inquiry themselves – or were unable to do so because they were no longer alive.

For this reason, documents from the concentration camps and those collected through the Allied foreigner tracing campaign were another important foundation of the name index. These documents contained information about individual paths of persecution and often provided clues about a person's last known location and fate. Starting in 1946, these personal details were also transferred to reference cards and filed in the CNI. This process, which continued in this way for decades, was known as *carding* at the ITS. Cards were arranged in the CNI following an alphabetical-phonetic system that took into account how the names were pronounced. This system had previously been used for the prisoner-of-war index of the ICRC in Geneva. It offered a solution to dealing with the name variations and misspellings that often arose due to the many different nationalities of the victims of persecution registered by the Nazi authorities and the DPs registered by Allied administrators. With this

system, all reference cards relating to the same person are filed together, regardless of how the name is written.

Parallel to establishing the CNI, the employees in Arolsen began creating case files in 1947 – known as *T files* ("T" for *tracing*) – for each person being traced. All correspondence and findings about an individual were kept in these files. If the ITS later received another inquiry about the same person, it would be added to the file. If no clues could be found in the CNI or the archive, the ITS would contact other tracing offices and local authorities. Immediately after the war, active searches were also conducted in former places of imprisonment and persecution.

Additionally, the ITS carried out *mass tracing* campaigns in the media until 1950. Employees would compile lists of missing persons, which were circulated in DP camps, published in newspapers and broadcast on the radio. In Germany and other countries, radio stations would set aside regular slots for reading out these tracing lists. The lists were usually published and broadcast where the ITS thought readers or listeners might have information, such as the last known residence of missing individuals.

But the search for missing persons was often a search for the deceased. A Special Registry Office was therefore established in Arolsen in 1949. This is the only office permitted to certify the death of concentration camp prisoners. To this day, death certificates are issued to the family members of former prisoners whose death in a concentration camp can be confirmed based on material in the *Arolsen Archives* or through research in other registry offices and memorials.

The Allies set up separate tracing structures for children and adolescents which were expanded at the ITS in 1948 to form the *Child Search Branch*. This department had initially been based in Esslingen at the US zonal tracing bureau and moved to Arolsen in 1950 when the zonal tracing bureau closed. The ITS Child Search Branch had two main responsibilities: it searched for foreign children who had been reported missing by their families, and it traced and registered unaccompanied children in order to find their parents or other relatives. Employees combed through German registry offices and orphanages in the search for clues about missing and abducted foreign children.

The language skills of the many DPs working for the ITS were tremendously helpful in all of these tracing activities. But when most of the DPs emigrated in the 1950s, the inquiries received by the ITS also changed in nature. The bulk of the hundreds of thousands of inquiries sent to Arolsen in the 1950s and 1960s were requests for confirmation of imprisonment or residence, which were needed for compensation claims in West Germany. Most of these inquiries were not from former victims, however, but from lawyers or officials who wanted to support or review such claims.

From 1954, these requests began to outnumber tracing inquiries. As a result, the search process increasingly involved research in the archive, and the work of the ITS became more administrative. This was reflected in the new name given to the *T files*, which were now known as *tracing/documentation files*, or *T/D files* for short. These files are still created and updated (digitally) each time an inquiry is received about a person. For information applicable to compensation proceedings, the ITS introduced a standardized certificate providing details about an individual's places and periods of imprisonment and reasons for persecution. ITS employees literally copied this information from the Nazi documents word for word, without offering any historical context. This was problematic for

many former victims because, according to the German Federal Law for Compensating Nazi Victims, only people who had been persecuted on political, racist or religious grounds were entitled to compensation. The information supplied from Arolsen often gave the authorities a basis for withholding benefits from Sinti and Roma people, homosexuals, so-called "anti-social elements" and nearly all non-German victims of persecution.

Following the Final German Federal Law for Compensating Nazi Victims of 1965, the number of inquiries received by the ITS continually declined. It was not until the late 1980s that a fresh wave of inquiries reached Arolsen. This was the result of new debates about forced laborers and other groups of "forgotten victims", as well as the introduction of previously non-existent compensation payments made by Germany to Nazi victims from Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War. Hundreds of thousands of inquiries reached the ITS each year, leading to enormous backlogs and waiting periods that sometimes lasted for years. The situation worsened in 2001 when payments began to be made to former forced laborers through the *Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future"* (EVZ). These applications were reviewed by seven international partners of the EVZ Foundation, who asked the ITS for confirmation in over 800,000 cases. To handle the immense backlog of cases, the ITS management introduced a CNI fast-track process, among other things. But despite these and other measures, the waiting times remained extremely long – a situation that was widely lambasted in the media and posed a major problem for elderly survivors.

Most of the inquiries received today – around 20,000 per year – come from the descendants of former victims of Nazi persecution, primarily from Poland, Russia, Germany, the USA, France and Israel, who want to find out more about the fate of their relatives and reconstruct their family history. To answer their questions, research is conducted in the archive and digital copies of the archival documents are sent together with explanatory information. But even today, new tracing processes are sometimes initiated and families are reunited.

Collecting and Organizing

For the purposes of tracing and documentation, it was essential to collect, index and evaluate the paper evidence of Nazi crimes. Important information was also found in documents drawn up by the Allies after the war to register and assist DPs. All of these documents, together with the *Central Name Index* and the *T/D files*, make up the *Arolsen Archives*.

But looking back to the origins of this unique archive, what we find first are the investigation documents produced by the ITS itself. Since many Nazi crimes were documented poorly or not at all, the ITS set out on its own search for evidence in the second half of the 1940s. For example, to gather proof of the death marches endured by many concentration camp inmates in the last weeks of the war, the ITS sent questionnaires to thousands of municipalities and former prisoners. Based on the responses, ITS employees were able to reconstruct the march routes and places where prisoners had died. Exhumations were carried out locally to find clues to the identity of the victims – such as prisoner numbers taken from their clothing, which could be compared with information from concentration camp documents. Many death march victims were identified in this way. Some of the first documents in Arolsen included these investigation documents as well as a similar collection of thousands of questionnaires in which former prisoners

provided information about little-known places of imprisonment.

The second pillar of the archive was the name index mentioned earlier. The vast majority of documents referred to in this index were not initially stored in Arolsen, however, but in the zonal tracing bureaus. It was only after these bureaus closed – when the task of tracing was joined by the documentation of persecution for compensation purposes in the early 1950s – that the ITS began to develop into an archive and be referred to as such. The *Concentration Camp Documents Section* was created first. Valuable documents that the Allies and survivors had secured from Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen and other camps were stored here. This section additionally held many other materials relating to concentration camp prisoners that had been produced by various offices – ranging from documents from top Reich authorities to lists of liberated survivors drawn up by aid initiatives in the early postwar period.

Until 1952, the ITS also received hundreds of thousands of lists of foreign forced laborers from the closed zonal tracing bureaus. These lists had been produced by German offices during the foreigner tracing campaign and they formed the core of the new *Wartime Documents Section*, along with registration documents for foreign forced laborers from hundreds of companies and authorities. Finally, at the end of 1952, over 30 tons of Allied DP registration forms, lists, and files were sent to Arolsen – a huge accumulation that made it necessary to create a *Postwar Documents Section*. The same organizational structure was soon established in all three sections: documents about individuals were stored in large alphabetical indexes, while lists of names were placed in series of files which were internally organized by subject matter, geography or chronology.

The archive therefore did not follow the principle of provenance that governs most of the archival world, according to which records from a particular source should be stored together as a unit by the responsible archive. Instead, records were arranged with the goal of ensuring the greatest possible efficiency when evaluating documents on the basis of individual names. This peculiarity poses a major challenge today for professional archival management and for researchers wanting to use the documents.

The name-based evaluation of the documents results in yet another peculiarity of the *Arolsen Archives*. Archival materials are traditionally defined as resources that are unique. Unlike printed books, they are usually only available at a single location. But along with original documents, the ITS also included millions of copies in its archive. The ITS had started searching for documents as soon as it was established. This activity intensified in the 1980s when it became apparent that the archive lacked information about many former forced laborers and Holocaust victims from Central and Eastern Europe in particular.

Equipped with microfilm cameras and eventually digital technology, ITS employees traveled all over Germany and the rest of Europe and made millions of copies of documents. This preserved valuable collections and provided important evidence needed for the compensation claims of tens of thousands of elderly victims of Nazi persecution. But the activities had a dark side as well. In the documents they acquired and copied, ITS employees often blacked out the names of all prisoners who did not belong to the target group of foreigners and victims of Nazi persecution. Their decision was based on the German Federal Law for Compensating Nazi Victims from the 1950s, even though this legislation excluded large groups of victims and had therefore been the focus of public criticism since

the 1980s. This shows just how much the institution in Arolsen had isolated itself, and how new public discussions and research into "forgotten victims" had passed by the ITS and its employees.

At the time, the ITS claimed that the archive had a purely "humanitarian mission," so it was interested almost exclusively in information about individuals found in its own collection. This was clearly reflected in the continual expansion of the CNI and in the creation of the *T/D files*, which have become valuable historical documents in their own right over the decades, as they often include personal testimonies and important information about paths of persecution and postwar life which are not recorded anywhere else. These materials, like the historical documents to which only ITS employees had access, were tools that were used intensively every day but were not given much protection.

This gave rise to two large, connected tasks that continue to occupy the *Arolsen Archives*: digitization and archival preservation. The digitization of the archival material in Bad Arolsen started in the late 1990s. Over 85% of the collections have now been scanned – a higher proportion than almost any other archive. Nonetheless, this is a major process that changes all the time due to new technologies and requirements and is nowhere near complete. While digitization initially served to speed up the process of supplying information, today it allows the documents to be accessed in a whole new way – not just in the reading rooms in Bad Arolsen or the facilities of selected partners, but on the internet as well.

Digitization is also an important element of document preservation, not just because once they have been digitized, the fragile documents themselves only need to be used in exceptional cases. Additionally, during the scanning process, harmful metals are removed from the paper and the documents are repacked. Many documents require more complicated treatment, however, such as deacidification, which protects the poor quality paper of the 1940s from further decay. These digitization and preservation processes are the most vivid proof of how the awareness of the value of these historical documents has changed. The paper-based evidence of the Nazis' machinery of persecution, which later served as a daily work tool for tracing individuals and clarifying their fate, is now recognized as cultural heritage of global importance and a foundation of remembrance that must be permanently protected and publicly accessible.

Openness versus Isolation

A debate raged for decades over whether the archive should be accessible for the purposes of research, education and remembrance. Phases of openness alternated with periods of isolation. The orientation of the ITS was determined largely by its directors, who established specific cultures of leadership during their time in office.

Until the early 1980s, under the management of the Allies and the first directors appointed by the ICRC, the ITS conducted a number of internal research projects based on its central mission of clarifying the fates of individuals. The ITS often lacked the specific information it needed to respond to inquiries about particular sites of imprisonment or types of crimes, such as medical experiments on concentration camp prisoners. To acquire this knowledge, employees reviewed documents regarding specific topics, conducted research at the sites of crimes, and questioned survivors. Their findings were recorded in special card indexes, on maps and in registers, such as the *Catalogues of Camps and Prisons* compiled by

the ITS. Surveys conducted in the late 1940s and early 1950s produced contemporary accounts that are important sources for scholars today. In this way, the ITS established itself as the central point of contact for authorities when it came to evaluating and recognizing individual camps for the purposes of compensation proceedings. This expanded remit embroiled the ITS in debates about Germany's reckoning with the past. Tensions frequently arose with the German Federal Government, which insisted that the ITS only include sites of imprisonment in its registers which the government was willing to recognize for compensation purposes – i.e. concentration camps, but not the tens of thousands of camps for forced laborers.

Parallel to this, survivors, scholars and memorial initiatives were able to conduct research themselves at the ITS from the late 1960s. The institution in Arolsen also supported large projects, particularly the Memorial Book of the Federal Archives for the Victims of the Persecution of Jews in Germany. This phase of openness was closely associated with the director at the time, Albert de Cocatrix. He had come to Arolsen as the deputy director in 1955 and led the ITS from 1970 to 1977. He positioned the institution on the side of the survivors and engaged intensively with victims' associations.

This phase of openness was brought to an abrupt end by the subsequent director, Philipp Züger, and his deputy, Charles-Claude Biedermann, who took over in 1985. Together they gradually closed the archive to researchers and wound down its historical projects. They justified this closure by referring to the self-perception of the ICRC as a neutral humanitarian institution and by adopting a narrower interpretation of the mission of the ITS as defined by the Bonn Agreements of 1955. They also employed arguments based on issues of data protection and personal privacy, which had become politically important in West Germany in the early 1980s. This new sensitivity to handling personal data affected the collection of further documents by the ITS. Social security authorities grew very cautious, and many companies were willing to release records only if the documents would not be accessible to third parties – such as critical historians. This new direction taken by the ITS administration was protested right from the start. The 1980s in particular were a time of fierce debate over the Nazi past in West German society. Following the motto of "dig where you stand," memorial initiatives explored local aspects of Nazi history that had fallen into oblivion and expressed solidarity with "forgotten victims." They accused the ITS of preventing a reckoning with Nazi history and of "protecting the perpetrators." Nonetheless, the *International Commission* – the governing body of the ITS – supported the administration's strategy. In 1984 the commission decided that collecting additional documents for the humanitarian mission of the ITS took priority over the interests of scholars and the public. The German Federal Government, which funded the ITS, strongly supported this policy.

New protests against the isolation of the archive were launched in the mid-1990s by victims' associations, the directors of various concentration camp memorials, scholars and concerned individuals. They published numerous resolutions emphasizing how valuable the documents stored in Arolsen were to research and commemoration, and they harshly criticized the long waiting periods for information needed for compensation claims. The ITS responded in 1996 by partially opening the archive and making it possible, in principle, to view some documents containing no personal information – though actually using the documents proved difficult. But this step did not bring an end to the protests. From the late 1990s, the question of whether the archive should be opened

appeared on the agenda of the meetings of the *International Commission* every single year. But it was not until 2007 that the archive finally reopened. This late turnaround was thanks largely to the tireless work of Paul Shapiro from the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (USHMM), who spent years building up political and media pressure.

As a result of the opening, the ICRC withdrew from its leadership of the ITS in 2012. The *International Commission* then took responsibility for appointing the directors, and it forcefully pursued a new course of modernization, openness and networking at the ITS. In the same year, the ITS collections were included on the UNESCO Memory of the World register. Since then, the institution has fundamentally changed. The archive and its process of providing information have been professionalized, and research and education have become a part of its mission. One important goal is to make the collections accessible online worldwide, and another is to explore new forms of remembrance and education together with partners. These changes are reflected in the institution's new name, which was introduced in 2019: *Arolsen Archives – International Center on Nazi Persecution.* In a Europe where the social and political solidarity established so painstakingly in the decades after World War II is disappearing, the documentation of Nazi crimes and their victims is still an urgent responsibility. And the fewer survivors there are to speak out and bear witness to the persecution, the more important this mission becomes.