

Nuremberg: Justice? J L Gabbott [3 July 2020 Camcot Classic]

Joseph is a little younger than I am, but we were both brought up after the War with a growing consciousness of the **Nuremberg** [and other] **War Crime Trials** which had taken place while we were between **1945 and 1949**. We both grew up unthinkingly appreciative of these trials, but as the result of a chance remark Joseph **became concerned with the Nature of the Trials and whether they had achieved Justice**. Accordingly, he has devoted a year of his retirement to researching this important question and, in 2020, published his book **Nuremberg: Justice?**

Because of this achievement and his being local, I invited him to present a lecture to the Society and, on meeting him for informal discussions, I realised that he had challenged my long-nurtured beliefs about the fairness of these trials. I think that many of our members who were brought up in the immediate post-war era will initially find his arguments surprising, but they may then be surprised to find it difficult to rebut them.

He will no doubt remind us of some basic facts to provide us with the context of these trials – which started soon after the liberation of **Belsen Concentration Camp** by British soldiers in April 1945. The British public – and the world – were so outraged by what was discovered that trials had to be held, but Joseph questions if the desire to see people punished did not undermine **Justice** for all concerned. I first came across the Commandant, **Joseph Kramer, the so called “Beast of Belsen”**, well before the end of the war when he commanded *Natzwiller-Struthof* Camp in Alsace, France, as my first piece of research. I must confess that I was relieved that he was executed after Belsen – but would our Joseph agree that he received **Justice?**

These trials were followed by the **Nuremberg Trials of 24 major War Criminals** between November 1945 and October 1946 [a month before my birth] and then by the **Far Eastern War Trials** from April 1946-1949.

I spent my camping holiday in the summer of 2022 reading his book in preparation for his lecture – and it was time well spent. **As a mere Historian, I would rate it as excellent**, especially as it tells the story in a readable way and is very well supported by historical facts contained in invaluable footnotes. His first chapter is indispensable for someone like me who has never read Law and Joseph has agreed to publishing it in this introduction so that you can brush up on basic legal matters.

From my own studies of the treatment of local British Prisoners of War in Burma, I was particularly angered by the apparent failure to try the Japanese Political Police [*Kempeitai*] for their unacceptably brutal treatment of POWs. Joseph confirmed this lapse but on **p154** we can read the reason used by the American authorities – and it certainly undermines my concept of **Justice**.

At the end of the book [p210], Joseph acts as counsel for both sides and asks us to make our own judgement based upon the evidence he has presented.

His Last Word? [p296-7]: He quotes *Cicero 106BC-43BC*: ***In time of war, the law falls silent: “Many of those trials were grossly unfair” BUT there are rules; sometimes they are obeyed, and it is a matter for congratulation. They set a benchmark by which opposing sides measure their actions. Cicero might have been right, but today “the law has found its voice, even if – at present – it is but a quiet one”.***

<p><i>I am sure at present many of us would like to see Putin tried as a war criminal – if he ever falls into our hands – but we would expect that he receives Justice?</i></p>
