

What We Knew – Terror, Mass Murder and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany
by Eric Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband.
John Murray 2005.

Students and scholars of the Third Reich owe a huge debt to Professor Eric Johnson for his studies of the period. Following the excellent *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews and Ordinary Germans*, Johnson has now produced *What We Knew*, in collaboration with German professor of Sociology Karl-Heinz Reuband: the fruits of a study that they commenced in 1993 and which was based on personal interviews with 500 German Jews and 3,000 non-Jewish Germans about their experiences before and during the Hitler years.

The book is divided into four parts, Jewish Survivors' Testimonies, "Ordinary Germans'" Testimonies, Jewish Survivors' Survey Evidence and "Ordinary Germans'" Survey Evidence.

The testimonies themselves make for harrowing reading, and though much similar material has been encountered before in other places, in this concentrated form it has huge power as well as containing details, particularly about the reactions of non-Jewish Germans towards the Hitler regime and the kindness shown to their Jewish friends and fellow citizens, that are surprising and moving. The testimonies of so-called "Ordinary Germans" vary considerably, including active opponents of the Nazi regime and enthusiastic collaborators, as well as bystanders who passively observed deportations and those who participated in mass murder.

The Survey Evidence is also an extremely important part of the book, where Professor Reuband brings his considerable skill in opinion research methods to bear on the evidence accrued from the interviews. There are some fascinating statistical analyses and also detailed summaries of key facts from the available data.

The abiding impression that is left by the book is confirmation that, contrary to so many protestations, the worst activities of the Nazi regime were widely known about in Germany, percolating through any number of channels to the general public, and also that the level of support for Hitler and the Nazi regime was very high among many Germans, even those who may not have approved of every action taken by the regime against the Jews.

This is a marvellous contribution to our knowledge about the Shoah and the psychosis that engulfed Germany in the 1930s and 1940s to the detriment of countless millions.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh