

Kristallnacht - Prelude to Destruction by Martin Gilbert.  
Harper Press 2006.

Martin Gilbert is one of Britain's greatest living historians, with a catalogue of books that more than justify this epithet. As well as the series of books that he has written as Winston Churchill's official biographer, Martin Gilbert has also produced several outstanding books about the Holocaust and his book *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* ranks as one of the finest current examples of books in this genre.

*Kristallnacht* is principally about the terrible events of November 9/10<sup>th</sup> 1938 across Germany, provoked by the Nazi regime in response to the shooting of one of its diplomats in Paris. The name, usually translated as *Night of the Broken Glass*, was given as a result of the thousands of windows of Jewish homes and businesses and synagogues that were smashed on the night, but it could just as easily apply to the widespread fracture between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens in Germany that was to irrevocably change German society and culture and result in the murder of 6 million non-combatant Jews.

Gilbert tells the story of *Kristallnacht* through its terrible events but, most poignantly, through the experiences of named individuals, a style adopted in his other books on the subject. These personal stories bring home in a way nothing else could the enormity of the night, its brutality and inhumanity, and the clear pointer it was to the catastrophe that would follow it for the Jews of Europe.

Martin Gilbert's latest book is a welcome addition to the corpus of literature on the Shoah as well as a powerful reminder of the implosion of German civilisation a mere 68 years ago.

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