

JEW AS NEWS

Jonathan Fishburn considers the reporting of events during the British Mandate in the Zionist and English press

If Herzl could read the contemporary British press, he would be hard-pressed to recognize the Zionism he helped to create and nurture at the beginning of the twentieth century. His successors could not have imagined how the fledgling State of Israel would come to be vilified in some sections of the mainstream media.

The Zionist movement developed a comprehensive literature of its own. In fact, Herzl established *Die Welt* in Cologne as a weekly newspaper in 1897 and it became the official organ of the World Zionist Organization after the 5th Zionist Congress in 1903. It was published until 1914.

Interestingly, London was a focal point for much of the literary activity in pre-State Zionist circles. Many periodicals were established to discuss the historical,

political, social and economic implications of the Zionist movement and its impact on world Jewry. As early as 1899, *Das Volk (The People)* was published in Leeds by the Zionist Publication Society. The *Zionist Review* incorporated *Junior Zionist*, a sort of *Secret Seven* for the younger generation. *Palestine: The Organ of the British Palestine Committee* proved an effective propaganda tool. According to the *New Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*:

The weekly contained valuable information not easily found elsewhere and its editorial presented a penetrating analysis of the military situation in the Turkish theatre of war. It was taken seriously and read regularly at the Foreign Office, War Office, and elsewhere.

Publication ceased in 1924, although a new series appeared from 1936 until 1940. The Jewish National Fund had a series of publications, as did the Keren Hayesod, extolling the virtues of communal settlements and supporting agricultural developments in Israel.

While these Jewish publications had their natural home and readership, the extent to which the general press took an interest in Palestine is also fascinating. One striking example is the *Illustrated London News*, the world's first ever illustrated weekly newspaper, which began publication on Saturday 14 May 1842. It consisted of 16 pages of world news interspersed with many images of personalities and significant events. Launched at a time when Britain was embarking on an epoch of unprecedented expansion and prosperity, the newspaper became the chief chronicle of the times. The paper was an instant hit – the first issue sold 26,000 copies and, within a year, the circulation, at sixpence, had risen to 60,000; by 1856, it was 200,000. During the 1930s and 1940s many front pages and feature items focussed on Mandate Palestine and the eventual establishment of the State of Israel. Some of the front covers include:

- 1) January 1947: Ceaseless watch and ward against terrorist activities in Palestine – troops patrolling the railway tracks near Jerusalem
- 2) October 1947: Police HQ in Haifa attacked by Irgun
- 3) December 1947: Flames arising from a Jerusalem Cinema – mistakenly thought to be Arab owned and fired



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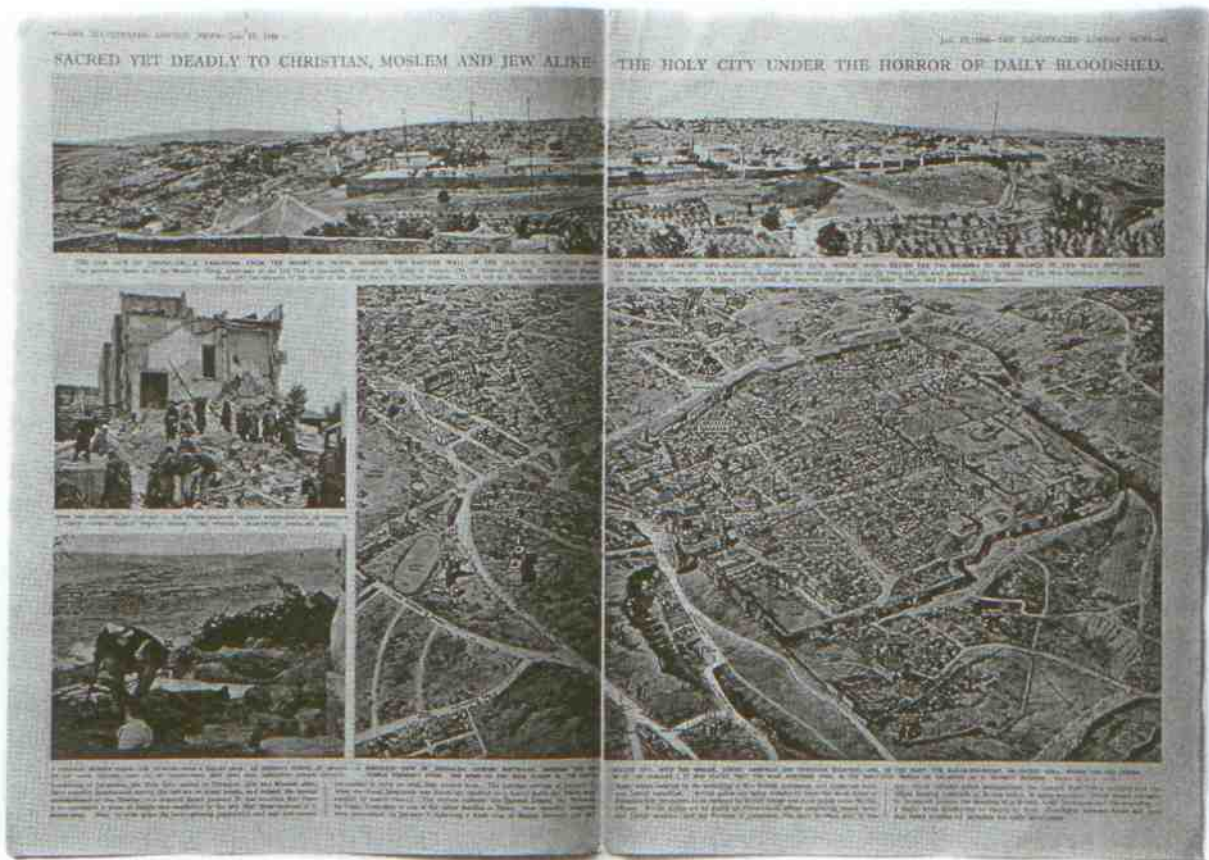
SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 1947.



THE CEASELESS WATCH AND WARD AGAINST TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN PALESTINE: TROOPS PATROLLING THE RAILWAY TRACKS NEAR JERUSALEM.

British troops in Palestine keep constant watch and ward against terrorist activities and disruption of road and railway services. Men of the 1st Battalion, The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry are here seen patrolling the railway tracks between Jerusalem and the village of Azra, on the line to Lydda. They act in close contact with

their headquarters, and should trouble be discovered, lay down a demolition team. Recent casualties in Palestine from terrorist activities during 1946 were as follows: Poles, 26 killed, 22 wounded; Jews and I.A.F., 45 killed, 57 wounded. In addition, 330 Arabes—British, Arab, and Jews—were killed or wounded.

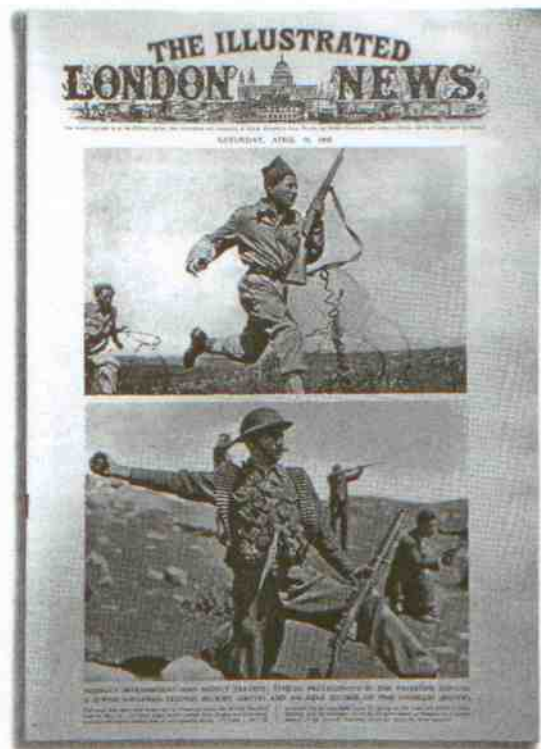


- by Jews in retaliation for Arab looting
- 4) February 1948: Tragedy of Ben Yehuda street – a view of the bomb-shattered Jewish shopping centre
- 5) May 1948: End of the Mandate

Most articles have vivid pictures with dramatic headings such as:

- * The car explosion at Haifa – an outrage which killed five
- * The shadow of terrorism over the Holy Land
- * The Haifa Oil Fire – A Stern Gang Outrage
- * Murder Planned and Perpetrated – the mounting toll of Jewish outrage
- * The End of An Ill-Advised attempt to force Great Britain's hand – how 4500 Jewish illegal immigrants were returned from Palestine
- * Capture of the Old City of Jerusalem – a great moral success – scenes of an 11-day battle resulting in a Jewish surrender

In our digital age, when thousands of pictures are generated, and discarded, by press photographers, it's easy to forget the time and effort that must have gone into producing such high-quality visual images. While these issues are part of a depleted supply of printed materials from the time, they are an important testimony to a period of history that has refigured Jewish life and continues to ensure that, for good or ill, 'Jews are news'. 📖



Jonathan Fishburn is an antiquarian book dealer specializing in Judaica (www.fishburnbooks.com). His latest catalogue – 'Zionism: 1000 items from Pre-Mandate Palestine to the Founding of the State of Israel' – is now available.