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Ruin Memories

Materiality, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past

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Materialising Skatås

Archaeology of a Second World War refugee camp in Sweden

Maria Persson

Introduction

After the end of the Second World War millions of people were refugees in a war-torn Europe. Extensive parts of the European landscape lay in ruin. This world-wide conflict was thus visibly manifested in the landscape; even today there are substantial traces left, which attract much interest from researchers within the field of archaeology dealing with the recent past. Through a questionable balancing act, Sweden managed to keep out of the war. Sweden is thus one of the countries of Europe with the least amount of material remains or traces of this conflict. Those remains that do occur consist largely of defensive works and lines of defence, built during the war in fear of German occupation. However, there are other kinds of remains, which are less known. This chapter is about such a place.

Gothenburg, situated on the west coast, is the second largest city in Sweden. The Skatås open-air sports centre is located on the outskirts of Gothenburg. The centre is calculated to have 1 million visitors a year making it a very well-known place in the city. People come there all the year round for various outdoor activities. Schools from different parts of the city hold their open-air lessons there. In the area, there is an extensive network of paths and tracks for walking, jogging and skiing. Further, there are bathing places and football pitches used by the football clubs of the city. Skatås recreation centre constitutes the central point of all this. The centre consists of a main building containing a gym and a restaurant, and thirty smaller and older buildings surrounding the main building. Although thousands of people visit the centre every day, very few are familiar with Skatås' particular history. In 1945, over 550 survivors from Nazi concentration camps came here. Skatås was then a rehabilitation camp set up for their convalescence. This was a place where these people could rest, receive medical care and with the help of the Red Cross, they could try to find out whether they had any surviving relatives in their own countries. The Skatås camp was in use for just under a year, from May 1945 to March 1946. When the camp was closed, it was sold to the city of Gothenburg and became the recreation centre it is today. The buildings in which the refugees had lived were altered to become changing rooms, transforming living-quarters for the survivors of the war into an

open-air activities centre for the people of Gothenburg, two distinct functions. Most of the buildings that housed the refugees still exist today and continue to be used as changing rooms or for other activities related to physical exercise and outdoor recreation. The story of the transformation of Skatås has been omitted from written history. This is all the more astonishing considering the number of visitors who come every day, many of them schoolchildren. Skatås is an apt example of how even contemporary history can rapidly be forgotten. The purpose of the archaeological project conducted at Skatås is to retell this history using archaeological methods as a leading element. In such a project as the one carried out at Skatås, an archaeological approach can work in two ways, partly as a source of information and partly as a catalyst for memories and contemplation. The latter part was possible to achieve since the project was carried out together with people who had connections with Skatås, both past and present. During the excavation, attention was paid to the interaction between people's memories, their experiences of the site and the setting of the excavation as an arena for this interplay.

In this chapter, I have chosen to emphasise the practical and empirical parts of the Skatås project; attention will be focused on discussing the work process and the different methods that contributed to the understanding of the contexts of the site. Further, a discussion on the potential of archaeological finds of the recent past is based on a selection of finds from the excavation. The theoretical concept of materiality is used to approach processes that created meaning during the course of this archaeological project of investigating the recent past.

Materiality

The concept of materiality involves a problematisation of the encounter between people and material culture, including the interaction between them (cf. Boivin 2008; Damsholt and Simonsen 2009; DeMarrais *et al.* 2004; Knappet 2012; Lazzari 2005; Meskell 2004: 249, 2005: 4; Miller 2005; Preucel and Mrozowski 2010; Tilley 2007). In line with Carl Knappet (2012) and Tine Damsholt and Dorthe G. Simonsen (2009), I consider that materiality can be encapsulated in three statements: materiality comprises the vitality (agency) of material culture; materiality is a relational concept based on social relationships, and materiality is performative – it involves things that happen.

Within archaeology, it is an established fact that material culture influences people's lives, although how much notice is taken of this fact varies. The first statement relates to the idea of material culture having a vitality and agency of its own. Within archaeology, theories concerning the agency of material culture are chiefly associated with the anthropologist Alfred Gell's theories about works of art; how they in their capacity as social agents influence people and society (Gell 1998). Gell defines an agent as somebody or something that makes things happen (Gell 1998: 16). Maintaining that material culture has the capacity of agency brings the concepts of subject and object into focus (Robb 2004: 131). A prerequisite for being able to discuss agency in material culture is to distance it from the dichotomy between object and subject, i.e. between material culture and humans. The purpose is not to make the object into the subject or vice versa. Rather, the point is to show that neither the subject nor the object, or if you so like, neither human beings nor material culture, should be seen as independent actors (Damsholt and Simonsen 2009: 25). The interdependence works both ways, which is an important part of the social aspect of material culture and of the concept of materiality in general. A significant point of Alfred Gell's is that objects are a part of social relationships in two ways; on the one hand, in social relationships between persons and objects; on the other, in

relationships between people *through* objects. These social relationships form networks in which objects are included as social agents – together with people (Gell 1998: 12). People as well as objects are agents in this social network, interdependent in their relationship with each other (Bennett and Joyce 2010: 9). Consequently, both agency and materiality are relational. This brings us to the next statement; materiality is relational and closely associated with social relationships. As already mentioned above, Gell defines two ways in which objects are included in social relationships. The main point here is that materiality never consists of one individual feature; materiality encompasses people *as well as* objects in relation to each other and to other materiality. Materiality could therefore be said to exist as a consequence of its relation to other features (Damsholt and Simonsen 2009: 23). The concept of materiality does not refer to the meaning or symbolic meaning of material culture; it concerns the social aspect, which might be termed the social capacity of material culture. We express ourselves as a part of the society that we live in, through the way we use and live with material culture. Material culture also helps us make bonds with other people and groups in the society in which we live (Dant 1999: 2). In such a way, materiality involves how humans organise their world and their social relationships through material culture (Preucel and Mrozowski 2010: 341). Thus, there are several levels of the relational aspect of materiality. It encompasses both the interaction between people and material culture, but also the way in which material culture influences the interaction between people. The concept thus involves regarding material culture in relation to something else, maybe people, objects or landscapes (Tilley 2007: 18). Therefore, materiality is composed of relationships. This is a process that is continually taking place. In agreement with this, the third aspect of materiality concerns the matter of materiality being performative; it is something that is done or that happens. Materiality is never something finished; it is continually negotiated and changed. In this way, the concept of materiality involves a process, a course of events (Damsholt and Simonsen 2009: 26). The verb *to do* is significant in this view of the concept of materiality. The things that are done should not by definition be centred on a human subject. Instead several different subjects and objects may be involved and concern several different actors (Ibid.: 13). Materiality should therefore be seen as an active verb giving attention to action and issues that are in progress (Arroyo-Kalin 2004: 74 and works cited in this publication).

When materiality is regarded as performative, the archaeological project in itself could be seen as a process of *materialising*. In line with this, the archaeological project is the actual arena for the encounter between people and material culture, but the archaeological project could also be seen as a process of materialising per se. In an archaeological project, we make things materialise; this occurs there and then through processes and negotiations in the relation between people and material culture. According to this view, in a project such as the Skatås project, we do not only investigate materiality. In particular, we make things materialise; in this case, the recent past.

Archaeology of a twentieth-century conflict

The excavation at Skatås can be further categorised within contemporary archaeology, and can be classed as 'Archaeology of twentieth-century conflicts'. There is quite a large amount of research conducted on this topic (cf. Burström 2012, 2009; Burström *et al.* 2006; 2009; 2011; Gegner and Ziino 2012; González-Ruibal 2011; Moshenska 2006, 2010; Myers 2008; Myers and Moshenska 2011; Pollard and Banks 2008a, 2008b; Robertshaw and Kenyon 2008;

Saunders 2003, 2004; Schofield 2005, 2009; Schofield *et al.* 2002; Schofield and Cocroft 2007; Theune 2011; Virilio 1994; see also the *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*). World-wide conflicts such as the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War have attracted most interest, but other later conflicts have also been of interest to archaeologists. Previously, this field of research was dominated by battlefield archaeology; these investigations concerned the actual battlefields. In later years, however, the field of research has been widened. Several different kinds of sites and remains associated with modern conflicts have been archaeologically excavated. Material culture related to modern conflicts encompasses occurrences ranging from sites in the landscape, buildings, monuments and individual objects. The types of sites that are excavated include battlefields, war cemeteries, bunkers and other defensive lines along with various constructions. During later years, several sites of different kinds of camps have been excavated; the term 'archaeology of internment' has even been mentioned (Myers and Moshenska 2011). For instance, several German concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Belzec, Buchenwald and Sobibor have been subjects of archaeological excavation (Theune 2011). In these cases, archaeological methods have been used in order to refute historical revisionists; archaeology is also useful for identifying occurrences that are not possible to find in historical sources (Myers 2008; Theune 2011). There are still survivors and written documents that can describe some of the concentration camps and death camps, where all traces have long since disappeared, often demolished before the end of the war. However, an equally common situation is that there are no written sources, nor any verbal reports; this means that the sites remain unobserved and risk being forgotten (Theune 2011). In these cases, archaeology is an evident option. Camps for prisoners of war have also been excavated. One of the latest is the excavation of the Whitewater POW camp in Canada, where Germans captured at El Alamein were interned (Whitewater POW camp homepage). In Sweden, camps for training Norwegian resistance fighters (Burström 2009) and a camp for Soviet soldiers (Lihammer 2006) have been excavated, as well as the camp for survivors from concentration camps discussed in this chapter (Persson 2011).

As we have seen, within archaeology of recent conflicts, a wider material point of view is studied. Thus, it is not just a matter of excavating battlefields or other sites associated with battles, this concerns a wide range of sites, material remains and artefacts resulting from conflicts. Another example of archaeological excavation, which is only indirectly associated with armed conflict, is the project concerned with Peace Camp Nevada, a place where protests were held against a test site for nuclear weapons (Beck *et al.* 2009). The project working on Strait Street in Valletta on Malta is yet another example; this was an entertainment district frequented by British and American soldiers (Schofield 2009: 113–22). Skatås is also an apt example of how war might result in sites and remains far from their commonly conceived and well-known arenas.

The Skatås camp

In 1945, around 550 women came to Skatås; they had been rescued from German concentration camps. These women were part of the last wave of refugees coming to Sweden during and after the Second World War. Skatås was part of a wider network of wartime camps in Sweden and should be regarded in this context. In the previous years, the need for camps had gradually expanded for various reasons (Johansson 2004: 15). These camps were relatively different in character, including military internment camps for foreign military refugees, work camps for Swedes called up for military service who had communist sympathies and camps for

Figure 23.1 Skatås soon after the rehabilitation camp days
The archives of Gothenburg Real Estate Office

'unreliable foreigners' who were considered to be a security risk. There were also military training camps for Norwegian resistance fighters (Berglund and Sennerteg 2008: 7–14, 40–3; Boëthius 2001: 149; Ekholm 1984: 66; Lihammer 2006; Rehn 2002; Smedmark 1963: 12). Subsequently, when survivors from concentration camps came to Sweden, existing camps could be used (Gottfarb 2006: 206–7).[1] Even though such rehabilitation camps as Skatås received a large amount of survivors from concentration camps during the years 1945–1946, these types of camps have not been the subjects of very much research.

The survivors who came to Skatås were Dutch and Polish women. They did not stay at Skatås all at the same time; they came in two different groups. Dutch women (around 300) arrived first, at the beginning of May, 1945. They were saved through the rescue action of 'the White Buses', which was carried out in collaboration between the Swedish Red Cross and the Danish and Norwegian governments under the leadership of the Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte. Due to Folke Bernadotte's negotiations with Heinrich Himmler, over 20,000 people from the Nazi concentration camps could be brought to Sweden between March and May 1945. Initially, the intention of the action was to rescue Scandinavian prisoners; but in the end, among others, Polish, French, Belgian and Dutch prisoners came to be included. A proportion of around 40 per cent of the 20,000 people who were saved through the action were Scandinavians (Liljewall 2000: 125; Koblik 1988: 117; Persson 2002a: 237–264; Åmark 2011: 546–553).

The White Buses travelled through a Germany that was torn by war. They drove day and

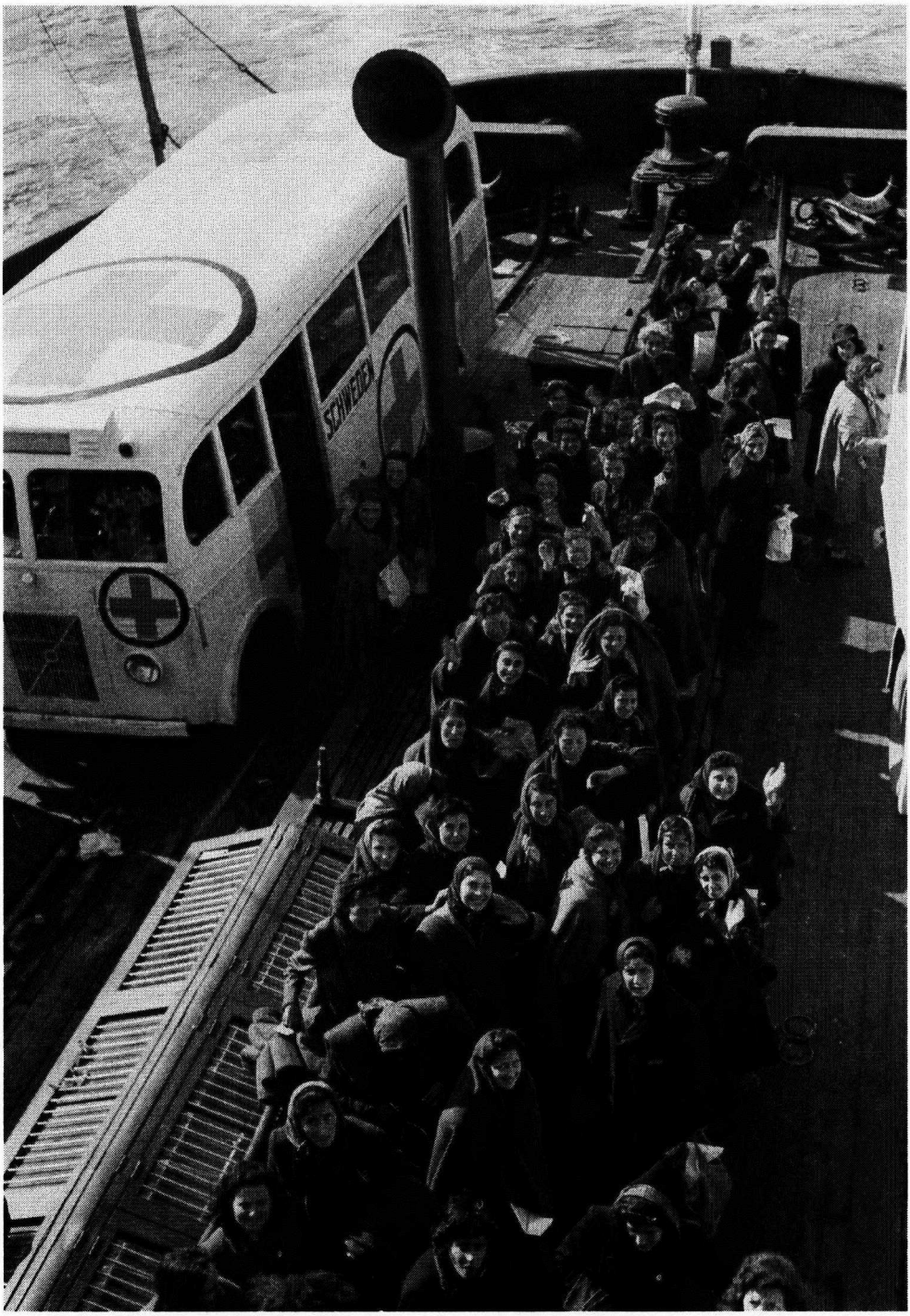

Figure 23.2 Women on their way to Sweden with the White buses
Photo: K.W. Gullers. ©Nordiska Museet

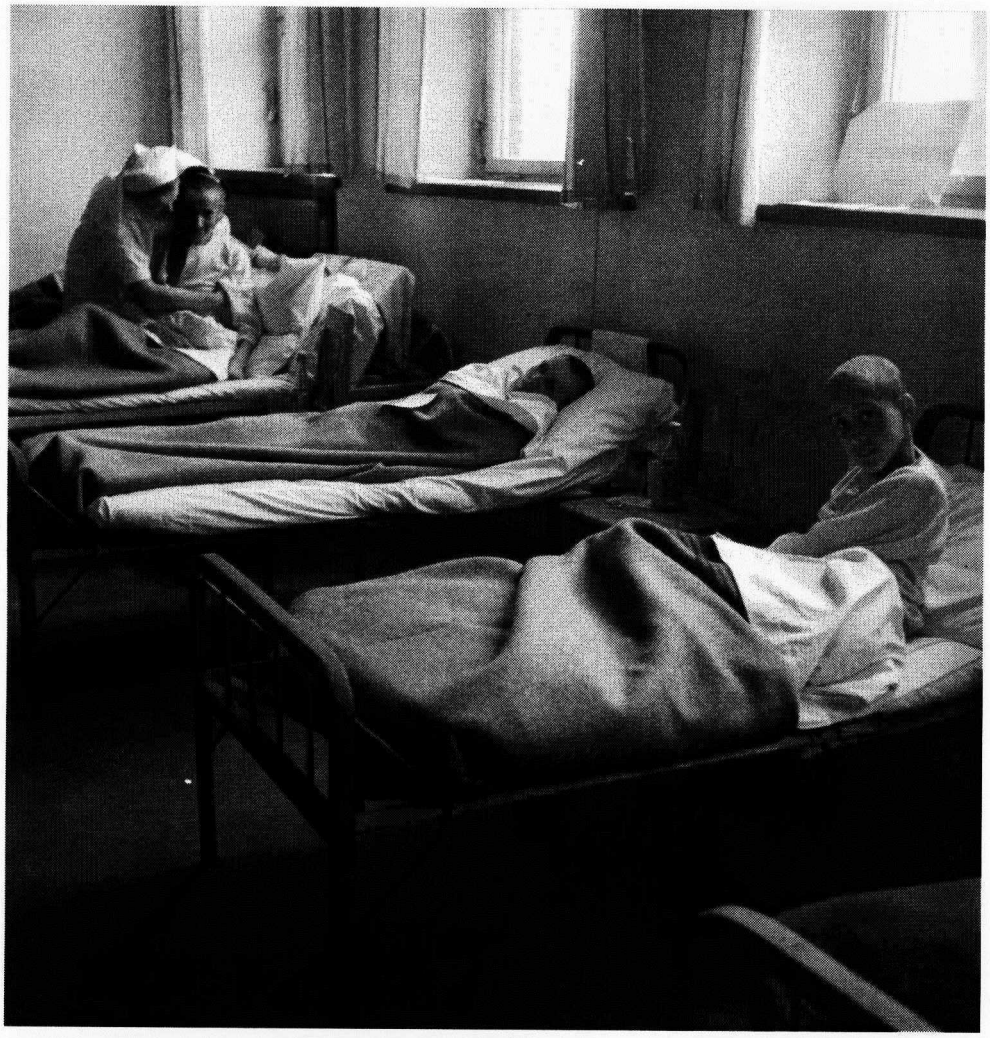

Figure 23.3 Some of the women who have just arrived in Sweden
Photo: K.W. Gullers. ©Nordiska Museet

night in convoy past blocked and bombed roads; during the night, they drove in the dark, without headlights. Sometimes there was an air-raid alarm and the drivers and passengers had to leave the buses and take shelter. The expeditions were attacked by both Allied and German air raids and artillery (Gottfarb 2006: 152; Persson 2002b: 338–9). Finally, they arrived in Sweden during the last days of April 1945. As soon as they arrived, the refugees were provided with food. Thereafter, they were given a bath and were treated for lice, the clothes they came in were burnt and they underwent a general health examination. They were accommodated temporarily in Malmö, in the south of Sweden. After one or two weeks, those who did not need extensive care in hospitals and sanatoriums were sent to rehabilitation camps and Skatås was

one of these. There were no less than 135 reception camps similar to Skatås throughout Sweden (Gottfarb 2006: 200–7; Olsson 1995: 14, 49).

The Dutch women stayed at Skatås during the summer of 1945. After they had left, during the late summer of 1945, another group of refugees came, a group of Polish women. They did not come via the White Buses, but through the reception of refugees arranged by UNRRA.[2] These refugees, comprising in total 10,000 people from Bergen-Belsen, were received by the Swedish government through an agreement with UNRRA. They arrived in Sweden in July 1945, and about 250 of them came to Skatås between August and November 1945 (Byström 2012: 24; Olsson 1995: 27; Statens Utlänningskommision. Andra världskrigets lägerarkiv, Skatås (The Swedish State Foreigner Commission, Second World War camp archives, Skatås)).[3] They stayed at Skatås during the winter of 1945–1946. The last of the Polish women finally left the camp in March 1946, after which the camp was closed (SUK).

At first, the camp was quarantined because of the illnesses that the women suffered from. A fence enclosed the area and people were forbidden to visit the camp (SUK). After a while, quarantine was no longer needed and life changed at the camp. A comparatively easy life started, with contact outside the camp. For instance, during the summer of 1945, the women could go bathing in the lake nearby. Various companies, organisations and private individuals visited the camp and arranged activities for the refugees such as music shows, plays, lectures, film shows and dances (SUK). Many of the women in the camp became friends with people from Gothenburg; some of these friendships were life-long. During our project, we met many people who told us about how they or their parents had got to know the women at Skatås. These informants told us that they had been to Skatås to give the women things such as food, lipstick and clothes. They had also made friends with them and invited them to their homes or on outings to see the sights of the city.

The time the women spent at Skatås varied, but neither the Dutch women nor the Polish women stayed very long, most of them just a few months. Registration cards in the archives concerning the camp provide information about where the women went after they left Skatås. Most of the Dutch women returned to Holland in August 1945. A small number stayed temporarily in Sweden to work or continue on to other camps. Concerning the Polish women, only a few went back to Poland, and most stayed in Sweden. Many of them soon found jobs; in some cases, the information entered in the archives of their destination after they had left Skatås was the name of a company. Some were sent on to other camps in Sweden, when the Skatås camp closed (SUK). There was thus a noticeable difference between the Dutch women and the Polish women. While most of the Dutch women returned to Holland immediately after their stay at Skatås, many of the Polish women stayed in Sweden. The reason is that the Polish women were given the official status of refugees during the winter of 1945–1946. This was not granted to the Dutch women; they had always been considered as repatriates. This official status as repatriates meant that they were intended to return to their own countries as soon as they were well enough. Initially, this was the intention for all refugees arriving in the White Buses and through UNRRA action. They were all 'invited' to Sweden for medical care and rest, but were then expected to return to their own countries. However, this was altered in regard to the UNRRA action (Gottfarb 2006: 24, 287; Liljewall 2000: 127). It was not difficult to find employment for those who stayed for a shorter period or permanently in Sweden after their stay at Skatås. Swedish industry had survived the war unscathed and needed workers to keep up with an expanding market. The social workers of the camp were assigned to help the refugees to find employment and an income. Employment could be arranged in different ways.

Figure 23.4 Aerial photograph of the Skatås camp. The photograph was taken (in 1969) after the days of the rehabilitation camp, but before renovation work was carried out

Archives of Gothenburg City Planning Office

It was possible to be given leave from the camp during daytime and still continue to live there. An alternative opportunity was termed an 'individual situation'; this meant being discharged from the camp. At Skatås, there was an employment office with the purpose of arranging contact with companies (Gottfarb 2006: 210, 262; Olsson 1995; SUK).

Some of the women were able to leave the camp after a remarkably short period and start work in Sweden, or return to their own countries. However, most of the survivors no longer had any relatives or a home to which they could return. Others had to stay in Swedish hospitals or convalescent homes for several years and some did not survive. Some twenty graves of people who died during the summer of 1945 are gathered in one part of the Jewish cemetery in Gothenburg. These are most likely people who were rescued, but did not survive.

Excavating the Skatås refugee camp

Even at archaeological excavations of the recent past, the excavated sites have usually been abandoned. Skatås is everything but an abandoned site; the area is calculated to have around 1 million visitors a year. Most of the buildings that constituted the camp, still exist and are in use. This brought special challenges to the excavation. Would it be possible to locate finds from such

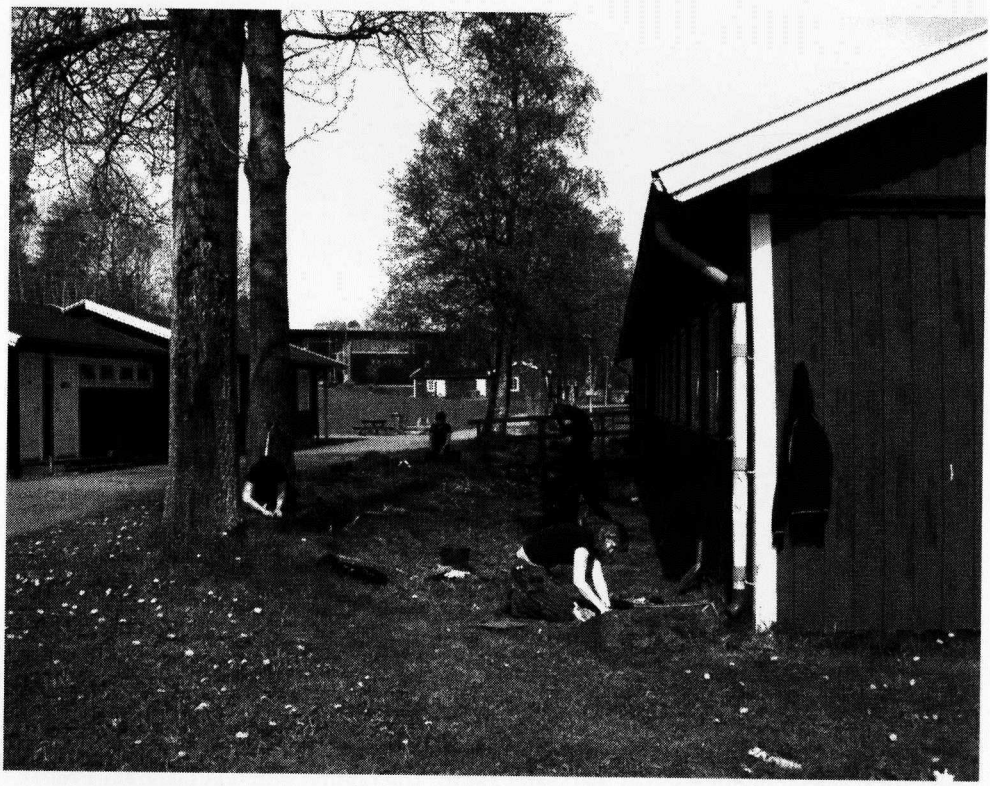

Figure 23.5 The excavation immediately beside the dining room of the camp. The sports centre is visible in the background

Photo: Maria Persson

a short timescale (less than a year) as that of the rehabilitation camp at Skatås in a context of continual use of the area ever since that time? The following section will deal with the different methods and sources that were used for recording the history of the Skatås refugee camp.

The excavation at Skatås started with a field survey and the area that comprised the refugee camp in 1945 was digitally mapped. The entire investigated surface is situated within the bounds of the modern sports centre of Skatås. The purpose of the first survey was to examine which parts of the camp that could still be found *in situ* and to search for locations that would be suitable for archaeological excavation. During the excavation, much attention was paid to the finds that were uncovered; although the still intact buildings act as the first clear and immediate reminders of the Skatås of 1945. The buildings provide indications of things that once happened inside them and offer a framework for the interpretation of activities on the site. Buildings that retain their original appearance and location are therefore crucial for the impression of a site (Schofield 2005: 51–3). Many buildings that were constructed in similar contexts were only meant for temporary use and were not built to last. Typically, temporary buildings are much simpler in their construction (Book and Bergman 2008: 159) and this is true of the buildings at Skatås. The huts were delivered as prefabricated sections, ready to be fitted together on-site (Göteborgs Stadsfullmäktiges Handlingar (Records of Gothenburg City Council)).[4] Nevertheless, the temporary huts of Skatås came to be permanent and have gradually been assimilated into permanent buildings. They help to visualise the camp quite clearly. The old-fashioned appearance was kept even when they were renovated, although nothing is left of the 1945 interior. The camp consisted of 30 buildings including living quarters, a dining room, wet rooms and a variety of buildings for storage. Today, around half of these are still standing. Some of the original buildings have been removed, but the location of them could be established by examining older aerial photographs and maps, which were transformed into digital form. The purpose was not, however, to uncover or to look for the structure of these removed buildings; the reason for this was the simple fact that their location was easy to establish. Instead, we focused on finds discovered in the ground *surrounding* the buildings. The excavation was mainly concentrated on the surfaces immediately adjacent to the buildings of the refugee camp still standing in place, where the soil could be established as not too disturbed. Apart from investigating the ground around these buildings, other surfaces interpreted as activity areas were examined. This was achieved through surveying, with the help of verbal communication and studying an older aerial photograph. The archaeological excavation was carried out by digging square metre units and test pits as well as a few smaller trenches. This method was used in order to assess the entire area comprising both the modern and wartime Skatås establishments, an area of no less than 19,000 square metres. The excavation was mainly concentrated around the dining room and the surface just to the east. Here, a few of the houses inhabited by the women still stand in their original place. The test pits were in other words not placed in a regular pattern over the entire surface, but only where the state of the ground appeared to be as undisturbed as possible.

Digital methods – mapping memory

One of the most valuable methods of the excavation was the use of digital documentation and cartography. The use of a total station and digital mapping is standard procedure at archaeological excavations and just as important when it comes to the archaeology of the recent past. Apart from its use in the usual documentation during the excavation, it was also used for on-

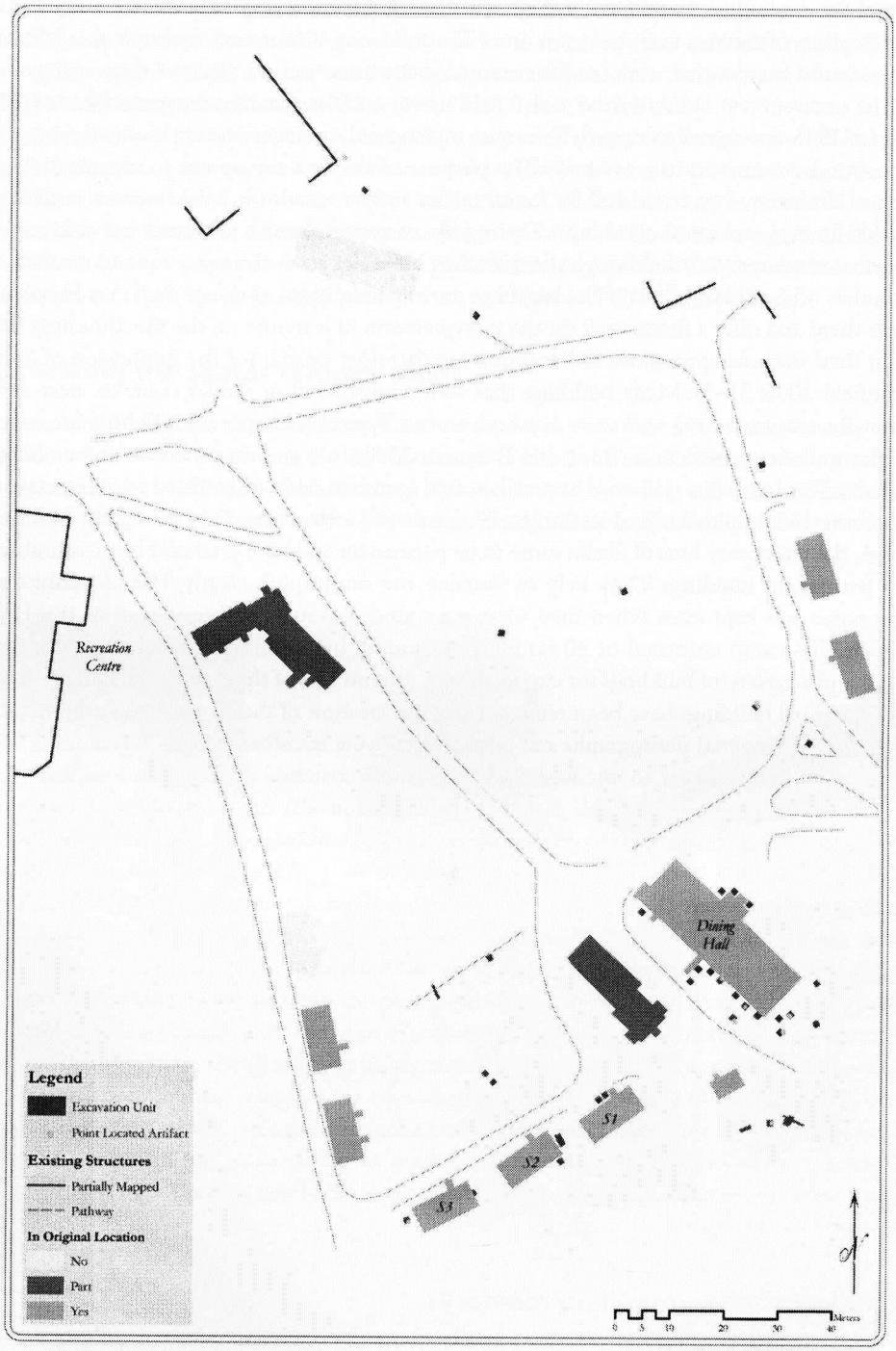

Figure 23.6 Plan of the excavation area. The excavated surfaces are marked
Digital recording and processing of data: Christopher Sevara

site orientation. This contributed to the possibility of taking a tour around the Skatås camp of 1945, with the help of a map. A map with several layers of information was created largely by digitalising an aerial photograph taken before the rebuilding work had been done. In this way, the Skatås camp of 1945 could be visualised on the modern map of today. It was then possible to relate the excavation to removed, relocated or intact structures of the camp. This contributed to the reconstruction of movement patterns in the camp. Several of the roads and paths at the camp have been removed or redirected; these were located with the help of this map, providing a clearer understanding of movement patterns and activities. For instance, a trench was excavated along the road between the dining room and some of the huts; the road was removed a long time ago and is no longer visible above ground.

Besides using a digital recording system to record past and present conditions at Skatås in the form of buildings and roads and to document the excavation, it was useful in yet another aspect, namely documenting memories. An important part of the project was the use of archaeological methods to evoke memories of Skatås, making the site of the excavation into an arena for these memory processes. The capacity of objects to evoke memories and the interesting relation between contemporary archaeology and remembrance has been discussed by several researchers (Burström 2009, 2012; Moshenska 2006, 2010; Myers 2008; Saunders 2002a, 2002b; Stone 2004; Tarlow 1997). I argue, in line with Pierre Nora, that creation, maintenance and negotiation of memories takes place in relation to materialities (Nora 2001). These materialities can consist of places in the landscape and of things, but also of pictures and gestures. More concrete, memory needs something to be attached to. This claim can explain what evokes memories at an excavation such as the one at Skatås. Memories that people had about Skatås were activated both through the excavation itself and by the finds, the material culture that was exposed. This can also be explained by what Paul Ricoeur refers to as 'the Phenomenology of Memory' (2004).[5] He claims that this consists of three parts. The two main components are *what* it is that is remembered and *who* it is that remembers. The linking bond between these two is the third component – *how* memory is awakened (Ricoeur 2004: 31ff). Applying this to the archaeology of the recent past renders the excavation and the finds what makes memories to come to light. People's memories of the Skatås refugee camp were activated through both the archaeological excavation itself and the archaeological finds, and made a substantial contribution to the interpretation of the site.

Consequently, yet another form of information was mapped at Skatås, people's memories of the place. As previously mentioned, this project was conducted together with the public and many people contributed with their experiences and memories of the Skatås rehabilitation camp. Some of these memories were associated with certain locations, actual physical places within the area. With the aim of documenting these memories, a new method was tested – making a digital map of these memory locations and recording them on the plan of the excavation together with other collected information. In this way, digital memory maps were created. The procedure was that the informant pointed out the location associated with the memory and an archaeologist recorded the place digitally with the total station, either as a dot or as a polygon depending on the type of memory. Either the person remembered being in a certain place on a certain occasion, or a larger area was recorded where the informant remembered certain events that happened. One feature that was recorded in this way was the location of the two entrances of the camp. These measurements were then related in the database to information about the informant and the memory expressed by the informant. With such a procedure, even this kind of information, collected during the course of the project, was possible

to document and relate to other data that was collected. Interaction between the memories of people and the archaeological material was thus documented according to a situational perspective in relation to the past and present landscape of Skatås. For more information about the memory mapping of Skatås, see Sevara 2011.

Other methods and sources

Except for memory mapping, the archaeological methods that were used at the Skatås excavation were methods that are commonly used in archaeology. A significant difference between prehistoric archaeology and archaeology of the recent past is that the latter nearly always includes other kinds of sources too. Written sources and/or oral history are commonly available when sites of the recent past are excavated. An advantage of being able to use written sources in such contexts as the Skatås excavation is the contribution to the understanding of the purpose of the site; the sources often provide details on organisation and construction, as well as administrative information (Schofield 2005: 34–8). On the other hand, the information these sources do not always provide is what actually happened on the site. The tension often mentioned to occur in historical archaeology between archaeological sources and written sources is particularly significant in contemporary archaeology (cf. Andrén 1998). In the case of Skatås, the entire archive of the camp is stored at the Swedish National Archives. The extensive bureaucracy involved in such a recreation camp as Skatås has provided us with access to a rich source of information. Among the contents of the archives of the camp, there is incoming and outgoing correspondence; there are also registration cards, which were made out for each woman on her arrival at Skatås. The registration cards provide information on the woman's name, date of birth, place of birth, nationality, which house at Skatås she stayed in, whether she was married, date of arrival in Sweden, date of arrival at Skatås, whether there were any relatives and where she went after she left Skatås (SUK). The documents of the archives also show which concentration camp the women were rescued from. This information can be found in police reports, which were written by the department for criminal investigation in Gothenburg, concerning 110 women. Such reports were made after the routine questioning of women who had the intention of finding employment in Sweden. This material shows that most of the women had been interned in several different concentration camps. Most of the Dutch women were rescued from Ravensbrück. The Polish women were mainly rescued from Bergen-Belsen. Before that, they had been held in a great number of concentration camps such as Buchenwald, Neusalz, Plaszow, Mauthausen, Majdanek and most had been incarcerated in Auschwitz. This documentation is a clear statement of the fact that concentration camp inmates were often sent from one camp to another. The reports also reveal which work the women were ordered to do at these camps; there was mention of work in the production of ammunition, in salt-mines, in medical experiments, forestry work, sewing, working at spinning mills and in the production of aircraft (SUK).

Another source of information that is nearly always present in contemporary archaeological contexts, at least to a certain extent, is oral history, people's experiences and memories of a place or an occurrence. As previously mentioned, archaeology of the recent past deals with a period of time that living people remember; material culture has the particular capacity of evoking these memories. This gives rise to existential experiences for the people involved, but also unique opportunities for making interpretations of the archaeological material. In line with this, an important aim of the Skatås project was to conduct the archaeological excavation

with the cooperation of people who had connections with Skatås. Consequently, during the excavation notice was taken of the interaction between the finds and the memories that people had about Skatås. For this purpose, the public were invited to join the project, partly to join the actual excavation, but also to visit during the excavation to tell us of their memories and experiences of the rehabilitation camp of Skatås. Besides archaeologists, more than a thousand persons became involved in the project. Those informants who were not able to visit us in the field were interviewed during other stages of the project. Our greatest hope was, if it was possible, of coming in contact with any of the women who came to Skatås in 1945. This hope was realised. One of our interviewees was a ninety-year-old woman, currently living in Stockholm, who came to Sweden with the White Buses and who later stayed at Skatås. Her information provided the interpretations of the material finds at Skatås with incomparable solidity and emotion. Several of the children of the women who came to Skatås in 1945 also participated in the project in various ways. Other informants comprised people who had other kinds of memories of the camp at Skatås. Many people who approached us told us that they had visited Skatås when it was a rehabilitation camp and had made friends with the women there.

Concerning Skatås, there is thus plenty of written and oral evidence which we could use in the project. The most advantageous way of working in a project concerning the archaeology of the recent past is to devise a method taking all the different kinds of sources into account. The different sources should be used in such a way that they contribute the most information but keeping the archaeological method and the archaeological sources as the main theme. Interpreting the recent past through an archaeological excavation of modern material culture, using archaeological methodology and an archaeological approach, involves setting the material aspect in the *first place*, even when other sources occur and are being used. I argue that the archaeological finds should be seen as what activates interpretation and meaning. Accordingly, the archaeological material forms a foundation for the history possible to retell through the project.

The potential of the finds

As it turned out, we retrieved an unexpectedly large number of finds that could be dated specifically to that short period of time covered by the project. This was one of the great challenges of the excavation; to see if it was possible to locate particular finds from such a short time horizon as that of the rehabilitation camp at Skatås, despite the context of continual use of the area ever since that time. We had misgivings as to whether the ground was too disturbed to provide finds that could be dated to this particular period. As it appeared, the ground was not as disturbed as we had feared, even if it had been intensively used ever since the period of the Skatås camp. In addition to finds with dating qualities in themselves (amongst other things, a coin from 1939), a large part of the other finds could be dated by examining the unexpectedly intact stratigraphy. In the layers beneath the time horizon of the Skatås camp, older artefacts were found that could be associated with a cottage, which had been situated nearby, before the camp was built. In the layers above the time horizon of 1945–1946, finds related to outdoor activities occurred such as medals and bottle caps. The assemblage of finds is considerably varied. Here, I will now present some examples of information that could be activated and attained through the finds.

A comb for delousing and the rim of a medicine bottle

Several finds indicated that this was a place for taking care of people who were ill. Among other finds, a shard from the rim of a medicine bottle was encountered. The archives reveal which illnesses the women suffered from; these included typhus, paratyphoid fever, tuberculosis and syphilis. Two of the buildings were set up as hospitals. There were doctors and other nursing staff stationed at the camp, although occasionally the women were so ill that they needed to be treated in hospital or at sanatoriums in the region. The Swedish medical service usually took good care of their physical complaints. Medical care was quick and effective; those who

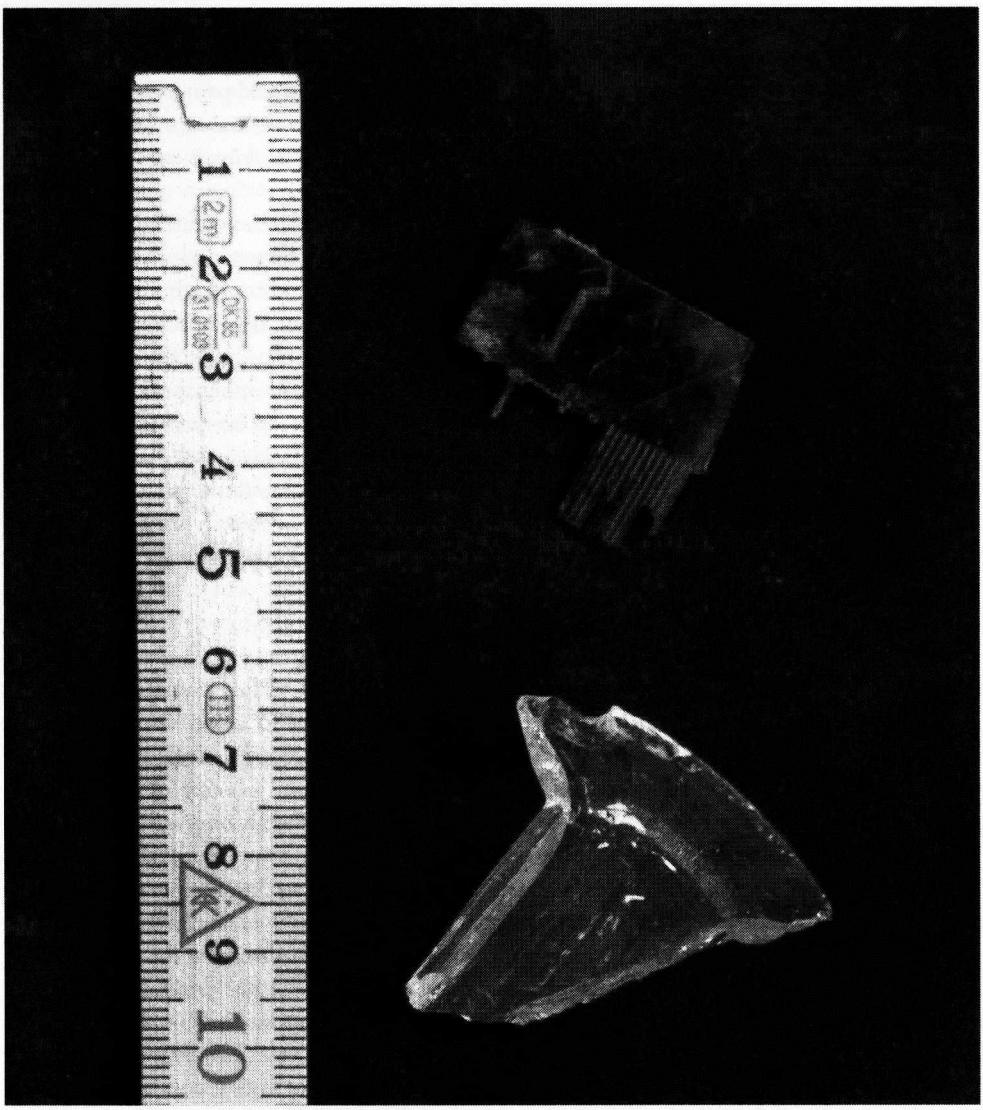

Figure 23.7 Piece of a comb for delousing and the rim of a medicine bottle
Photo: Maria Persson

were ill were taken to hospital, to sanatoriums or to convalescent homes. However, this was the case for physical illness; no treatment was provided for mental problems unless the women were severely afflicted. There was only one case mentioned in the archives of a woman who left Skatås to go to a mental hospital (Gottfarb 2006: 301; SUK).

The fine-toothed comb for delousing directs our attention to another problem; several of the women were still infested with parasites and lice when they came to Skatås. When they arrived in Sweden, their clothes were burnt and they were treated for lice (Gottfarb 2006: 200). It became evident that this treatment was not sufficient; the problem of lice followed them to Skatås. The comb for delousing is an illustrative artefact, which is easy to set into a context. Nevertheless, the comb was not adequate for getting rid of the lice. The fact was that some women were so infested that they were treated with DDT, which for us today seems outrageous. Among the documents in the archives of the Skatås camp, instructions can be found from the Royal Swedish Board of Medicine; these were sent out to refugee camps stating that the inmates could be treated with DDT.

> 'According to information that has reached the Board of Medicine, major or minor infestations of body lice have been encountered at several larger camps for refugees and evacuees, despite the treatment that was conducted on arrival in this country. Experience, including evidence from abroad, indicates that cleansing performed according to the hot-air method does not commonly suffice. In view of the favourable results of a new chemical insecticide used by the fighting nations, this insecticide has been tested at a few camps in our country, in consultation with the Medical Service Centre of the Swedish Armed Forces. Since mass treatment against lice with DDT appears to be possible to perform with no great difficulty and at relatively slight cost, this should be a suitable treatment for body lice at camps for refugees and evacuees'.
>
> (SUK, my translation)

Needles, bottles of ink and paint

When the women at Skatås began to feel better, various activities were organised for them and they were also given the opportunity to find employment. One of the objectives of the staff at the camps was to help the refugees to find employment and earn an income. For this purpose, one of the buildings at Skatås contained an employment office (SUK). Voluntary associations such as the Red Cross and other relief committees also helped in the organisation of activities and in providing opportunities to earn an income through employment outside the camp or at the camp. Orders were taken for various craft items that could be made at the camp (Gottfarb 2006: 210–12). Simple sewing jobs were performed on order in the huts where the women lived. Two needles were found that would have originated from this work.

The women were also given the opportunity to write letters as suggested by two base fragments of ink bottles. The Red Cross helped the women search for relatives that might have survived. A resolution was passed that letters sent by 'foreign evacuees from Germany under the care of a refugee camp to the home country of the concerned person' were to be free of charge. Such letters were called 'Red Cross greetings' and the postage was free of charge all over the world. Letters requesting information about relatives were also received at the Skatås camp; people asked whether their relatives might possibly be found at Skatås (SUK). Red Cross

Figure 23.8 Needles, lumps of paint and base fragments of ink-bottles
Photo: Maria Persson

Figure 23.9 Painting that was painted at Skatås, currently hanging at the Gothenburg office of the Red Cross
Photo: Maria Persson

Greetings were sent in large numbers across Europe as well as to the United States. In many cases, there were no surviving relatives and the women were the sole survivors. These small pieces of glass are a significant example of how a couple of shards contribute to a much wider story.

We also found some small lumps; these were bits of paint. One of the activities that were organised at Skatås was painting. Through some investigative work, we managed to locate a painting that was done at Skatås. The painting hangs in the Gothenburg office of the Red Cross, donated by one of the Dutch women who stayed at Skatås. It is signed with her name together with the words ''45 Skatås'. The painting is an illustrative description of the women's journey from the concentration camp to Skatås. The upper section of the painting shows the concentration camp with the working women guarded by a female SS-officer with an Alsatian dog. In the background, the chimney of the crematorium of the camp is visible. In the middle section of the picture, the journey to Sweden with the White Buses is shown. At the bottom of the painting, their time at Skatås is depicted; the woods can be seen and one of the buildings of Skatås. A woman is sun-bathing and there are women dressed in blue overalls. The text of the painting reads:

> This drawing is a gift to the Swedish Red Cross to convey the gratitude of the Dutch women for all the good work that was done for us.
>
> (My translation)

Barbed wire

The discovery of barbed wire was undoubtedly the most discussed find of the excavation. It originates from the fence that enclosed the camp. We knew that a fence surrounded the camp through the study of maps from the construction phase of the camp (GSH). These maps did not tell us, however, that it was a barbed wire fence. Verbal reports confirmed that this was the case. If a barbed wire fence enclosed the Skatås camp, what were the feelings of the women who were rescued from the horrors of a concentration camp about being fenced in by barbed wire once again? Did they feel that they had come from one imprisonment to another? This question was much discussed during the excavation among archaeologists, among the public and in the media. During the excavation, the local tabloid published a full-page article with the headline 'This is where we detained Hitler's victims' (Lindroth 2008), based on the discovery of the barbed wire.

Our informants described the extension of the fence and that it was 'a net fencing with barbed wire at the top'. They also told us where the main entrance gate was. The feeling of an enclosed camp became clearly perceptible when we found the barbed wire. There are different ways of interpreting this barbed wire fence. During the first period, the camp was in quarantine. This was determined according to a document from the Royal Board of Medicine.

> Due to the risk of bringing infection into Sweden, the refugees must be placed in quarantine during their first period in the country. During the quarantine, the evacuees must not come in direct contact with persons outside the camp. Unauthorised persons must be strictly kept outside.
>
> (SUK, my translation)

Figure 23.10 A piece of barbed wire found at Skatås
Photo: Maria Persson

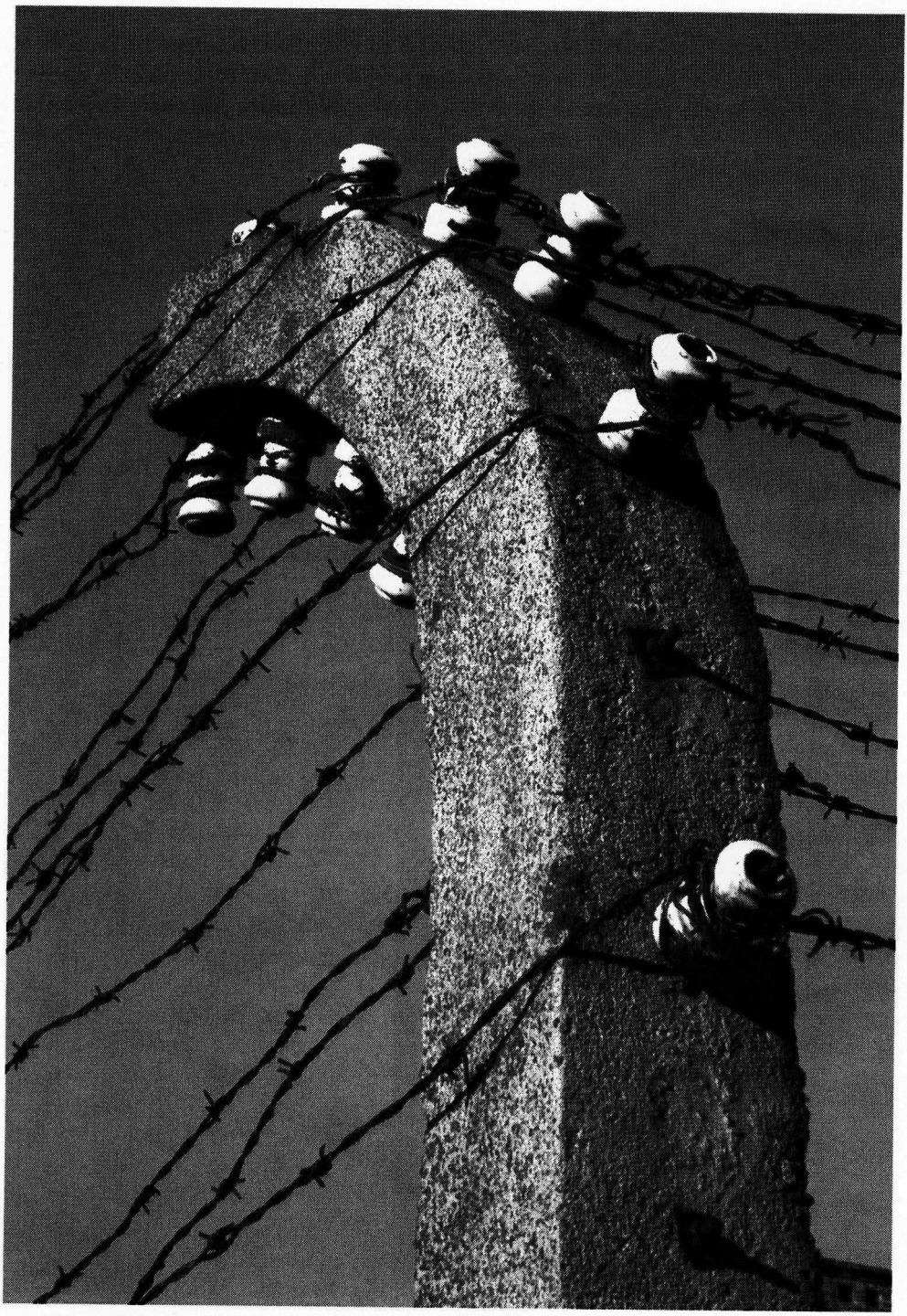

Figure 23.11 Electric barbed wire at Auschwitz
Photo: Maria Persson

There was nothing strange about quarantine, since many of the women suffered from tuberculosis and typhus. The fence was not only intended to keep the sick within the confines of the camp, but was also meant to keep inquisitive people at a distance, in order to prevent infection. Many people were curious about these women after having read about their arrival

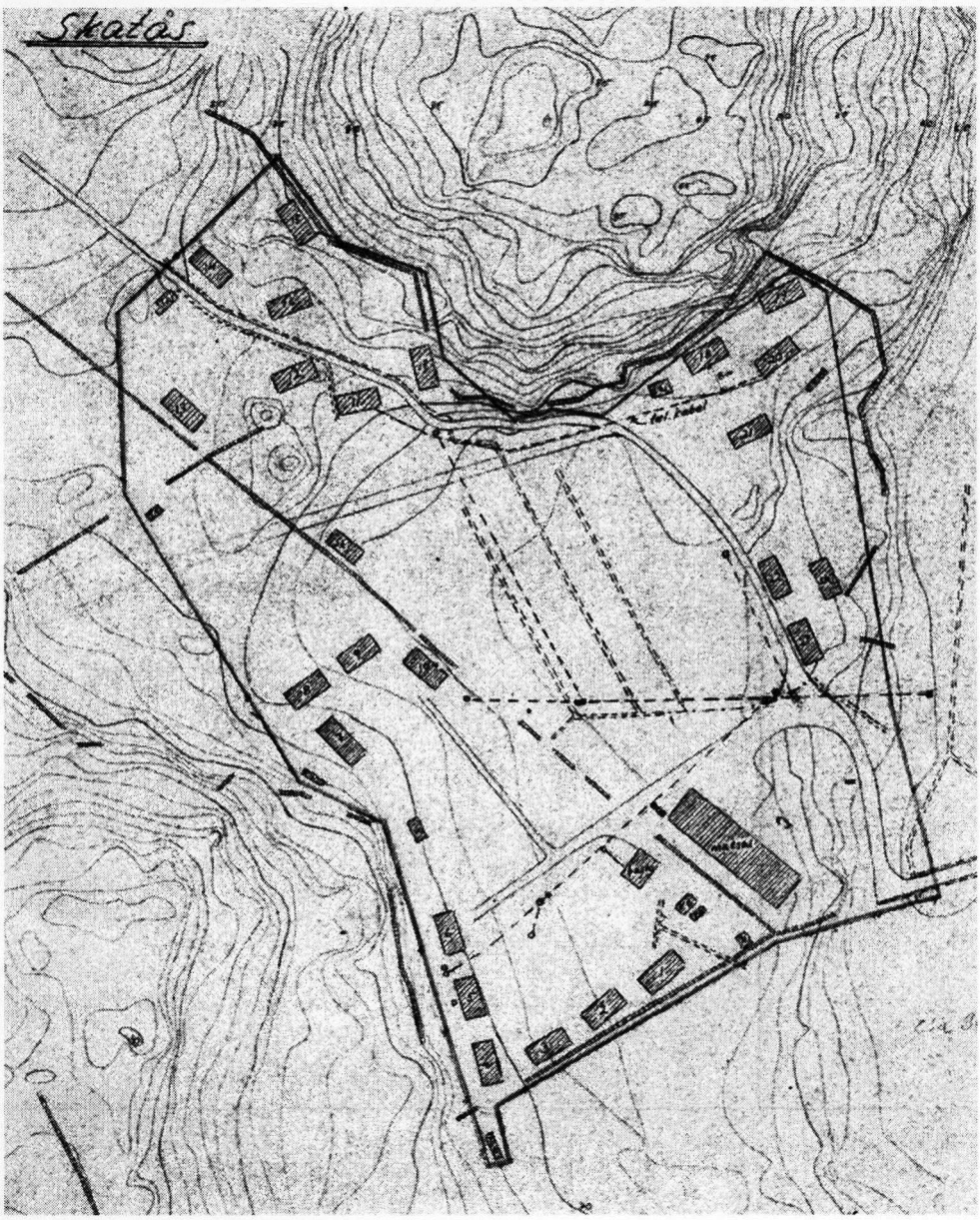

Figure 23.12 Map of the Skatås camp with the fence marked
Records of Gothenburg City Council

in Sweden in the newspapers. A lot of people came to Skatås to help the women or to offer gifts. One informant mentioned that life had been rather confined during the war and they now felt that it was interesting to meet these people. Several informants said that they found it interesting to have the opportunity to practise languages, to speak German and English. These informants remember the barbed wire fence and how they spoke to the women through the fence and that they threw gifts to them over the fence. After a while, more precisely on the 8 June 1945, the period of quarantine was over; this was around a month after the Dutch women had arrived, at the beginning of May (SUK). The camp does not seem to have been in quarantine when the Polish women arrived later during the summer of 1945; there are no documents concerning this in the archives. However, there is another way of regarding the matter. Within the organisation of wartime camps in Sweden, a difference was made between 'open' and 'closed' camps. In open camps, the inhabitants were not regarded as internees; these camps were in practice places where accommodation was arranged for their stay in Sweden (Johansson 2004: 44). Besides these open camps, a number of closed camps were established; these were called internment camps. Camps such as Skatås were classified as 'open', but could still be said to be relatively closed in character. The inhabitants had to apply for a permit if they wanted to stay somewhere else for a while. If they wanted to make a shorter visit outside the camp, they had to apply for leave of absence. These applications quite often received a denial. If anybody left the camp without permission, this was reported and an inquiry was made. A late return to the camp was reported and reprimanded. In the archives, the women at Skatås were on several occasions even mentioned as internees. Throughout the entire period when the camp was in use, it was guarded by the police, which rather emphasises the feeling of a closed camp. Until February 1946, five policemen were employed as camp security staff, with dogs to help them in the work (SUK).

The term 'open camp' could therefore today be seen as a relative concept. The Second World War has been regarded as a watershed in Swedish immigration politics, which were earlier characterised by anti-Semitism, racial biology and hostility towards foreigners. During the second half of the Second World War, Sweden received around 200,000 refugees, a turning point in the Swedish reception of refugees, which was previously on a minimal level (Byström 2006: 13 and works cited in this publication; Olsson 1995; Åmark 2011: 519–34, 550). The historian Mikael Byström maintains in his doctoral thesis (Byström 2006) that the matter is not as simple as a clear-cut changeover from one view to another. He points out that an anti-Semitic current still existed after the end of the war and that there was a certain amount of aversion to foreigners; this influenced the way we took care of refugees coming to Sweden during this period. Byström observes that the Swedes primarily only had a genuine feeling of responsibility towards people from the other Scandinavian countries. Until the end of the war, humanitarian work and refugee politics were focused on our Scandinavian 'brother peoples' (Byström 2006: 95). Initially, even the White Bus action was intended to encompass only citizens of the Scandinavian countries. Choosing this line of reasoning, we could say that this hostility towards foreigners was reflected in the archaeological material through the barbed wire.

It is possible that this barbed wire fence was afforded unreasonable attention in our eyes. After all, some of the people who came to Skatås were seriously ill. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the women were not free to come and go as they liked. They did not have real freedom at Skatås. The discovery of the barbed wire definitely clarified that they lived a very controlled life there. The barbed wire is a good example of how controversial a small rusty piece of wire can become;

as an archaeological find, it gave rise to many discussions and provided the opportunity to tell a complicated part of history.

Conclusion

These accounts only cover a small proportion of the finds and narratives that were uncovered through the excavation, but they are expressive examples of how we were able to come closer to history, on both a physical and cognitive level, through the finds. To retell the history of Skatås through an archaeological perspective, with the help of the finds that were discovered on the site, makes the history more substantial. As mentioned, interpretations of finds were made in relation to written sources and oral information. The latter consists of people's memories and experiences of the Skatås camp in an interaction with the archaeological finds, the material culture. By conducting this project together with the public, an arena was created for this interaction.

The concept of materiality can be used to approach the processes of this interaction. Materiality can be explained as the social relationship between material culture and people. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the concept of materiality can be described in agreement with three statements; it comprises the agency of material culture, it is based on social relationships and it is performative. In line with this, in a project such as the Skatås project, we do not only investigate materiality. More particularly, we make things materialise. At Skatås, this process of materialisation occurred in the interaction between the people who were part of the project and the finds that were encountered.

The history of Skatås, uncovered by the excavation project, could thus be said to be governed by the finds. Despite the fact that oral and written sources were used in the interpretation of the material culture, it was still the finds that gave us the opportunity to tell the particular history that unfolded. With another assemblage of finds, a different history would have come to light. The finds are what *activated* the other sources and the history unfolded. Thus, in this case, material culture is distinctly provided with agency.

Materiality is a useful tool for analysing the potential of archaeology in a study of recent history. The concept encompasses the encounter and interaction between people and material culture. In a project such as the Skatås project, these interactions essentially occur on two levels – *in the past and in the present*. The first fairly apparent use of the concept is to interpret studied contexts according to materiality in order to explain *past* occurrences. This is a more traditional archaeological approach to the interaction between people and material culture, although applied to recent contexts. At an archaeological excavation of the recent past conducted in close cooperation with groups of people with an interest in the examined site, a further level of interaction between people and material culture is reached *in the present*. This might certainly occur at excavations of occurrences dated to any period. However, yet another perspective appears when we are confronted with material culture from the recent past, material culture to which we undoubtedly have a relation, namely an existential perspective. According to this view, understanding the recent past and ourselves through our interaction with material culture, i.e. through materiality, could be regarded as the core of contemporary archaeology. Material culture upholds our values, ideas and feelings, influencing how we experience the world around us and our understanding of ourselves. It could be said that we encounter society through the material culture that we surround ourselves with (Dant 1999: 1, 2005; Miller 2005; Tilley 2006: 61). This is particularly significant from a contemporary archaeological perspective. In this way,

archaeology of the recent past has an existential dimension; it is an archaeology conducted on a real-time basis, concerning our own lives.

Notes

1 However, the Skatås camp had not been a camp during the war. It was built as late as 1944, to be used as living quarters for operators of the anti-aircraft gun that was placed in the vicinity (*Göteborgs Stadsfullmäktiges Handlingar* (*Records of Gothenburg City Council*)). Skatås was never used for this purpose and could be utilised by the Swedish State Foreigner Commission when the arriving refugees needed accommodation. The huts of the camp could quickly be made ready for their arrival. Skatås should still be regarded in same context as these camps, particularly considering the bureaucratic perspective.
2 United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.
3 Hereafter abbreviated: SUK.
4 Henceforth abbreviated GSH.
5 I interpret this as how the past shows itself through memory.

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