

**Re-enacting the Second World War:  
History, Memory and the *UK Homefront***

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## Abstract

Historians currently engage with film either as a form of evidence or as a medium for representation. This doctoral thesis aims to move beyond this binary by examining how historians can use film-making as a research method for generating new insights into certain areas of historical research, such as public history and cultural memory. Focusing on the Second World War re-enactment group *UK Homefront* as a case study, my investigation uses film-making to analyse how members of the group ‘make’ history, use re-enacting as a pedagogical tool, and contribute to the cultural memory of the war through their representations of aspects of the homefront experience. This thesis also considers how historians who use film-making as a research tool can disseminate their insights through the mediums of film and prose.

Over three chapters and a fifty-minute research film, I explore how historians can use film-making as a research method and I reflect on the results that this approach can produce. The thesis begins by building on scholarship in visual anthropology and oral history to discuss how historians can employ film-making as a research tool. Then it moves onto demonstrate how historians can use film-making to research re-enacting as a form of public history, charting how and why members of *UK Homefront* re-enact. Finally, I engage with the group’s re-enacting as a form of cultural memory and use film-making to uncover the fluid, dynamic, and contested nature of cultural memory as it is manifested at re-enactment events. Through an examination of both film-making as a method and the insights that it can generate, my thesis demonstrates how film-making offers historians a method for research which can provide new insights into the sensory and the embodied aspects of public history and cultural memory.

## Declaration

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The research film *Re-enacting the Second World War: History, Memory and the UK Homefront* (Ben Knowles, 2016) is available to view at the following websites:

<https://vimeo.com/168074601>

<https://filmingthepast.com/re-enacting-the-second-world-war-history-memory-and-the-uk-homefront/>

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## Introduction

This thesis examines how historians can use film-making as a research method. Just as the use of oral history complicated ideas in social history founded on textual evidence and offered historians a new way of ‘doing’ history, this thesis argues that film-making can, where appropriate, offer the historian, ‘a quite different way of knowing related phenomena’.<sup>1</sup> Film-making as a research tool opens up fresh possibilities for research into areas like public history and memory, as well as offering historians alternative ways of approaching material culture, embodied knowledge, performance and emotions.

Film-making as a research method marks a conceptual shift away from the view of film as either a form of evidence or as a medium for representation. Since the 1970s historians have increasingly used film as source material for research. For example, historians like Jeffrey Richards, Penny Summerfield and Max Jones have used films such as *Sanders of the River* (Zoltan Korda, 1935), *Khartoum* (Basil Dearden, 1966), and *The Cruel Sea* (Charles Frend, 1953), to understand how film-makers, audiences, and societies have negotiated ideas such as empire, masculinity, and gender.<sup>2</sup> As well as this approach, historians such as Robert Rosenstone, Alison Landsberg, and Natalie

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<sup>1</sup> David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 61-63; Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, ‘Oral History: the sound of memory’, in Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird (eds.) *History Beyond the Text: A student’s guide to approaching alternative sources* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge, 1973); Penny Summerfield, ‘Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War, 1939–60’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22, 3, (2011), pp. 330 – 353; Max Jones, ‘National Hero and Very Queer Fish’: Empire, Sexuality and the British Remembrance of General Gordon, 1918–72’, *Twentieth Century British History*, (2014), pp. 1 - 28. For other examples of historians using film as source material see: Michael Chopra-Grant, *Cinema and History: Screening the Past* (Columbia: Short Cuts, 2008); Annette Khun, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); Penny Summerfield, ‘Film and the Popular Memory of the Second World War in Britain 1950-1959’, in S. Grayzel and P. Levine (eds.), *Gender, Labour, War and Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 157-175; Martin Francis, ‘Remembering war, forgetting empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British cinema’, in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 111 - 132; James Chapman, Mark Glancy, and Sue Harper (eds.), *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



Zemon Davis have explored how film as a medium disseminates existing knowledge about the past to non-academic audiences.<sup>3</sup>

Of these existing approaches to film it is the latter that is the most relevant to this thesis and historians interested in film as a medium for discussing the past have approached this subject in two principal ways. On the one hand, historians have had an active working relationship with film-makers as expert consultants, writers, or presenters, shaping the film and trying to ensure that the historical research conveyed by the film is accurate, well-researched and reflects recent insights into academic thinking.<sup>4</sup> Both Simon Schama and Natalie Zemon Davies have written about their own experiences of working collaboratively with film-makers and have discussed the challenges and frustrations involved in the process of communicating the past on screen. A common theme is the tension that arises when the historical veracity of the film is subordinate to artistic or commercial concerns.<sup>5</sup> In a more positive vein, Desmond Bell has written about the ways that historians and documentary film-makers can collaborate more closely to produce intellectually engaging history documentaries.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, historians have engaged theoretically with how film and television works as a medium to convey knowledge about the past, focusing upon issues of historical representation and narrative. Robert Rosenstone has approached the idea of film and history from a postmodern perspective, arguing that film history, like written history, follows narrative conventions that are important for historians to understand and

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<sup>3</sup> Other work to have considered how film can represent history are: Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Marcia Landy, *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *American Historical Review*, vol 93, (5), (1988), pp. 1193 - 1199. See, also: Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006); Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Movie or Monograph? A Historian/Filmmaker's Perspective', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 25 No. 3, (Summer 2003), pp. 45 - 48; Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); David Cannadine, 'Introduction', in David Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1 - 6.

<sup>4</sup> For example, *History and the Media* is a collection of essays edited by David Cannadine which offers various historians and film-makers perspectives upon the practicalities involved in discussing the past on screen, focusing particularly on output for British television. See Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media*.

<sup>5</sup> Zemon Davies, 'Movie or Monograph', pp. 45 - 48; Simon Schama, 'Television and the Trouble with History', in Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media*, pp. 20 - 33.

<sup>6</sup> Desmond Bell, 'Documentary film and the poetics of history', *Journal of Media Practice*, Vol.12(1), (May, 2011), pp.3-25

appreciate.<sup>7</sup> For Rosenstone, despite the focus on film and television produced for a non-academic audience, history on film need not be a watered down version of written history and can offer fresh and thought provoking ways of discussing the past.<sup>8</sup>

Underpinning this body of work on history and film is the perception that the role of the historian and the film-maker are separate: films are first and foremost made by film-makers and historians offer support in this process to either a greater or lesser degree. Historians can be academic advisers, co-writers, script supervisors but they are not the *makers*. Moreover, film-makers are not interested in contributing to academic history; as Bell points out, ‘film-makers are in the first instance primarily concerned with the production of an art object rather than with a “research outcome”’.<sup>9</sup> I would add that of equal importance to the film-maker are the expectations of the film’s audience which, with a commercial film, tends to be more interested in entertainment than a research outcome. Indeed, film-makers do not make films about history specifically for an academic audience but instead films are a means of communicating ideas about the past to a non-specialised audience.

This thesis diverges from these existing approaches and instead picks up the camera in order to consider how historians can use film-making as a research method, understood as ‘the tools and techniques appropriate to history as a field of study, together with “methodology” or the larger principles which underpin the tools and techniques, and justify their usage’.<sup>10</sup> To explore this idea I have made a fifty-minute documentary about a Second World War re-enactment group, *UK Homefront*, that focuses on two members of the group, Sandra Day and Simon Kerstin. Alongside this film I also produced a number of research clips about the group that are available to view on the website [www.filmingthepast.com](http://www.filmingthepast.com). For this reason this thesis can be understood as practice-based research; a process that, by reflecting on one’s own creative work, encourages creative practices like film-making to be analysed critically

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<sup>7</sup> Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History*, pp. 11 - 31.

<sup>8</sup> Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History*, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Bell, ‘Documentary film and the poetics of history’, pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire, ‘Introduction: Why Bother with Method?’, in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (eds), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 1.

and the tacit knowledge involved in the film's production to be made visible.<sup>11</sup> As such, this thesis uses my own practice to examine how film-making can be used by historians as a tool for conducting research and explores how film-making affects, 'everything from the original framing of the research hypothesis to the design of the study, the selection of the sources and the manner in which they are analysed'.<sup>12</sup> Using a practice-based approach allows researchers to advance knowledge about practice and, in this instance, illuminates the possible film-making processes that historians could use as a research method.

More than just an investigation of film-making as method however, this thesis also demonstrates the value of film-making to History by using the group's practice to contribute to the scholarship on re-enacting and the cultural memory of the Second World War. It is therefore important in this introduction to discuss the following key areas: film-making as a research method; *UK Homefront* as a case study for this method; the structure of this thesis.

## **1. Film-making as a research method**

Whilst historians are yet to embrace film-making as a method, visual anthropology is one of the few academic disciplines to have explored the use of film-making as a research tool.<sup>13</sup> Visual anthropology is a subfield within anthropology where researchers produce ethnographic films as part of the research process and present these films to both academic and popular audiences.<sup>14</sup> There is a longstanding relationship between history and the broader discipline of anthropology. With a shared interest in culture and social phenomena as well as a traditional emphasis upon empirical evidence, both

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<sup>11</sup> Jouko Aaltonen and Jukka Kortti, 'From evidence to re-enactment: history, television and documentary film', *Journal of Media Practice*, 16:2, (2015), p. 110; Desmond Bell and Fearghal McGarry, 'One cut too many? History and film: A practice-based case study', *Journal of Media Practice*, 14:1, (2014), pp. 6 - 7.

<sup>12</sup> Gunn and Faire, 'Introduction: Why Bother with Method?', p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Basu, 'Reframing Ethnographic Film', in T Austin and W de Jong (eds.) *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives and Practices* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), in, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> Visual anthropology can also be understood as the anthropological study of visual culture but in this thesis, visual anthropology refers to research practices that use film, video, and photography. See Jay Ruby, 'The last 20 years of visual anthropology – a critical review', *Visual Studies*, 20:2, (2005), pp. 159 - 170; Peter Crawford, 'Film as discourse: the invention of anthropological realities', in Peter Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 73 - 74.

disciplines have drawn on aspects of the other's work to inform their own, and as such, visual anthropology offers useful and necessary foundations for the methods used in this project.<sup>15</sup>

Anthropology has a relationship with film-making that dates back to the 1890s and, over the past one hundred and twenty years, anthropological researchers have regularly used film. This has ranged from Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in the 1930s who used film-making in their research in Bali, to observational film-making from the 1970s and the contemporary use of film-making to explore ideas such as imagination, embodied knowledge and material culture.<sup>16</sup> During this period, the possibilities of film-making and research have been heavily debated within the field of anthropology. While anthropologists such as Kirsten Hastrup believe that film is useful solely as an accompaniment to written anthropology,<sup>17</sup> a growing number of scholars such as David MacDougall and Peter Crawford have argued that film-making can be a method that enables the anthropologist to generate new insights and knowledge about their areas of research.<sup>18</sup> In MacDougall's view:

A useful method for distinguishing between the anthropological film and the film about anthropology, I would suggest, is to assess whether the film attempts to cover new ground through an integral exploration of the data or whether it merely *reports* on existing knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Anthropologists, MacDougall argues, should aspire to make anthropological films rather than films about anthropology.<sup>20</sup> This thesis applies this distinction to the relationship between film and History. Instead of using documentary techniques associated with the traditional history documentary that convey existing knowledge, this thesis builds on the

<sup>15</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice: second edition* (London: Hodder Education, 2006), pp. 71 – 77.

<sup>16</sup> For a history of visual anthropology see Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research* (London: Sage, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Kirsten Hastrup, 'Anthropological visions: Some notes on visual and textual authority', in Crawford and Turton (eds.), *Film as ethnography*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Pink, 'Introduction: Situating Visual Research' in Sarah Pink, Laszlo Kurti and Ana Isabel Afonso (eds), *Working Images: Visual research and representation in ethnography* (Routledge, London, 2004), p. 4; Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 170; Paul Basu, 'Reframing Ethnographic Film', p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 76.

<sup>20</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 76; Ruby, 'The last 20 years of visual anthropology', pp. 159 - 170.

work in visual anthropology to explore the ways that historians can use film-making as a tool for historical research.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently it is important to establish the areas of research where film-making can be used a tool to generate new knowledge. After all, given the potential barriers involved in the use of film-making, such as costs and technical expertise, there needs to be good reasons for the historian to apply this method. Again, the field of visual anthropology proves instructive. In this discipline there is an acknowledgement that there are limits to how text can enable academics to engage with cultures, communities and people.<sup>22</sup> This is particularly the case when the reduction of culture to a text can exclude or obscure sensory knowledge, understood as ‘how people perceive their material environment and interact with it, in both its natural and cultural forms, including their interactions with others as physical beings’.<sup>23</sup> Anthropologists have used film-making to address this issue and explore areas of society and culture that are ‘accessible only by non-verbal means’.<sup>24</sup> With its ability to record and disseminate the visual, sensory, and emotional aspects of human life, film-making thus offers visual anthropologists a way of understanding how people engage with the world in ways other than just cognitively and textually.<sup>25</sup>

These broad areas of focus can be usefully transposed to the study of history. With its ability to explore the non-verbal aspects of cultures and communities, film-making offers historians a tool that can compliment existing textual approaches to the

<sup>21</sup> Examples of techniques used in traditional history documentaries to convey existing knowledge about the past are voice-of-God narrators, the extensive use of archive, and academic interviews. Simon Schama provides a useful discussion of the processes involved in working on a history series for television. He reveals how he worked with film-makers to devise ways of discussing his own understanding of the past in a way suited to film as a medium. For example he used a blend of narration and impressionistic images to convey information about different events. Rather than using film-making to gain fresh insights, his experience was very much on how best to report existing knowledge. See: Schama, ‘Television and the Trouble with History’, pp. 20 – 33.

<sup>22</sup> Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 246. See also: Sarah Pink, *The Future of Visual Anthropology* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), pp. 3 – 20.

<sup>23</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, p.

<sup>24</sup> See: MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 61-62; David MacDougall, ‘The Visual in Anthropology’, in M. Banks and H. Morphy (eds), *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 292.

<sup>25</sup> Pink, ‘Introduction: Situating Visual Research’, p. 5; Cristina Grasseni, ‘Video and ethnographic knowledge: skilled vision in the practice of breeding’, in Pink, Kurti and Afonso (eds), *Working Images: Visual research and representation in ethnography*, pp. 15 - 30.

study of people's relationship with the past and those processes where 'putting the past into a narrative' takes a physical and observable form.<sup>26</sup> This thesis therefore uses film-making to engage with the field of public history where there is a desire to comprehend the visual and sensory experience of people, groups, and communities as they engage with the past.<sup>27</sup> Thus, this thesis focuses on re-enactment, where there is an emphasis on practices and processes and an academic desire to better understand the connections re-enactors develop to the past through emotion, the bodily, and material culture.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons, I chose to use the re-enactment group *UK Homefront* as a case study for this thesis.

## **2. *UK Homefront***

*UK Homefront* are a re-enactment group based in the north of England and members of the group portray various aspects of the homefront in Britain during the Second World War. The group was founded in 2005 by Ian and Sandra Day and has around twenty-five to thirty members although this number has fluctuated as the circumstances of the members have changed (as a result of relocation, financial pressures, or their enthusiasm for it etc). Within the group, there is a spread of ages, mainly from the forties to the sixties, although there are generational outliers such as children and eighty-year-olds who experienced the war first hand. Members re-enact a range of everyday homefront occupations – they include Co-op workers, housewives, Bevin Boys, ARP wardens, land girls, members of the Women's Voluntary Service and girl guide leaders. The group's aim is 'to bring to life the normal every day spirit of the 40s'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>27</sup> Hilda Kean, 'Introduction', in Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds.), *The Public History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 1; See also MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, pp. 4 - 8,

<sup>28</sup> Katherine M. Johnson, 'Rethinking (re)doing: historical re-enactment and/as historiography', *Rethinking History*, 19:2, (2015), pp. 193-206; Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering, 'From Realism to the Affective Turn: An Agenda', in Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering (eds.), *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 1 – 17; Mads Daugbjerg, Rivka Syd Eisner and Britta Timm Knudsen, 'Re-enacting the past: vivifying heritage "again"', in Mads Daugbjerg, Rivka Syd Eisner and Britta Timm Knudsen (eds.), *Re-enacting the Past: Heritage, materiality and performance* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1 – 3.

<sup>29</sup> From the *UK Homefront* website, <http://www.ukhomefront.co.uk/index.html>, accessed 4 December 2014.

The group re-enact at different sites around the north of England. These include regional museums like Chesterfield Museum and Art Gallery, privately run museums such as Eden Camp in Yorkshire (a converted Second World War Prisoner of War camp) and Elvington Air Museum, and at local events in towns like Colwyn Bay and Lytham St Annes. The events themselves can be multi-period re-enactments where different historical periods are re-enacted or they can be events that just focus on the Second World War (see Appendix 1 for a detailed list of events the group attended in 2013 and 2014). At events, the group have displays about different aspects of the homefront, such as the Bevin Boys, wartime weddings, and Air Raid Protection (ARP) Wardens. For this thesis I filmed the group at thirty-five events over the course of four years and focused on how and why the group re-enact and what this can reveal about the contemporary cultural memory of the Second World War.

Re-enactment is an area that has been interrogated by a range of academic disciplines such as performance studies, museology, anthropology, history, and leisure and tourism studies.<sup>30</sup> This thesis however approaches re-enactment as a form of public history and draws on the literature in other disciplines where relevant. Public history is understood as ‘a process by which the past is constructed into history and a practice which has the capacity for involving people as well as nations and communities in the creation of their own histories’.<sup>31</sup> Public history provides this thesis with a conceptual framework for exploring the varied and complex ways in which people connect with the past through re-enactment, and this thesis interrogates how the members of *UK Homefront* ‘make’ history as much as how they ‘think about’ history.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For examples of the diversity of disciplinary approaches see the following: Petra Tjitske Kalshoven, *Crafting ‘the Indian’: Knowledge, Desire and Play in Indianist Reenactment* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012); Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2007); Megan O’Brien Backhouse, ‘Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses: History and Identity’, in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (eds.) *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 113 - 130;

<sup>31</sup> Kean, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> The edited collection *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts* for example primarily asks ‘what does public history look like?’ See: Hilda Kean, ‘Preface to the Paperback Edition’, in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (eds.), *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. xv; Emma Waterton, ‘People and their pasts: public history today’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17:2, (2011), pp.195-196; Kean, ‘Introduction’, p. 1; Anna Green, ‘Review’, *Oral History*, 37:2, (Autumn 2009), pp. 116 – 117.

The benefit of using film-making to explore this aspect of re-enacting is in some sense obvious and immediate; film-making offers a visual documentation of the complex choreography involved in a re-enactment event when the re-enactors are ‘making’ history, from portraying a wartime occupation at an event to their interactions with the public and other re-enactors.<sup>33</sup> And where writing about re-enacting can provide overarching descriptions and lists of examples, film is a way of addressing the local and of crystallising detail.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, however, for re-enactors the ‘doing’ of re-enacting profoundly shapes their relationship with the past and how they think about and engage with history.<sup>35</sup> Thus, this thesis is also interested in giving a greater weight to the role of embodied experience and the sensory knowledge in re-enacting.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, this method also offers the historian a means of disseminating their research in an alternative form to a written thesis. In this instance, the accompanying film allows this thesis to show ‘the unsayable’ aspects of re-enacting by discussing the members of *UK Homefront* with images and sound.<sup>37</sup>

As well as considering how film-making can be used by historians this thesis also engages with a key idea that underpins the scholarship on re-enactment and living history interpretation. There is a perceived distinction between the aims and re-enactment practices of the amateur hobbyist and the professional re-enactor.<sup>38</sup> The former is cast as concerned primarily with personalised historicised experiences and the

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<sup>33</sup> As Paul Henley suggests, film-making is a way to ‘communicate a sense of the lived experience of the events and situations observed’, a useful tool for research into re-enactment groups which can often become abstracted into generalisations. Instances of film conveying the experiences and processes involved in the group’s re-enacting can be seen throughout the accompanying film and research clips. Specifically, the discussion between Simon and the public at Colwyn Bay over the meanings of his Bevin Boy display demonstrates the benefit of film-making in capturing the processes involved in re-enacting at a public event. See: Paul Henley, ‘Putting film to work: Observational cinema as practical ethnography’, in Sarah Pink, Laszlo Kurti and Ana Isabel Afonso (eds.), *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 114; <https://filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/>

<sup>34</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, p. 239.

<sup>35</sup> Katherine M. Johnson, ‘Rethinking (re)doing’, pp. 193 – 195; Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering, ‘From Realism to the Affective Turn: An Agenda’, pp. 1 – 17; Daugbjerg, Eisner and Knudsen, ‘Re-enacting the past: vivifying heritage “again”’, pp. 1 – 3.

<sup>36</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 59 – 60.

<sup>37</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, pp. 4 – 8; MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 287 – 288.

<sup>38</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 109.



latter interested in educating their audiences. As such, academics have focused on hobby re-enactors relationship with authenticity and their quest for immersion in the past.<sup>39</sup> Professional re-enactors meanwhile are considered in terms of education, and academics like theatre historian Scott Magelssen and performance theorist Paul Johnson have analysed their performance in terms of their educational impact.<sup>40</sup>

This thesis uses the re-enactment practices of *UK Homefront* to complicate this distinction between the amateur and the professional re-enactor. It supports the view that amateur re-enactors are highly motivated by the opportunity for affective engagement with the past that re-enacting affords.<sup>41</sup> However, this thesis also demonstrates how the members of *UK Homefront* regard re-enacting as a pedagogical tool that, through their use of displays and interaction with the public, enables the group to share their knowledge about the war.

*UK Homefront*'s re-enacting also enables an examination of the cultural memory of the Second World War in contemporary British society, which, although it ended more than sixty years ago, remains a central aspect of British popular culture. As Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson write:

[F]ew historical events have resonated as fully in modern British culture as the Second World War... [d]espite it receding further into the distant past with that generation's passing, it continues to have a lingering and very vivid presence in British popular culture so that even those who were born in its aftermath have particular "memories" of it.<sup>42</sup>

As such, the cultural memory of the Second World War has a particularly rich historiography. Historians such as Penny Summerfield, Geoff Eley, Noakes, and Martin Francis have used museums, films, statues, books, websites, and material culture for evidence of how aspects of the Second World War like gender, citizenship, and class

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<sup>39</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 112 – 113; O'Brien Backhouse, 'Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses', p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2007); Paul Johnson, 'The space of 'museum theatre': a framework for performing heritage', in Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (eds.) *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 53 - 66.

<sup>41</sup> Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn', pp. 299 – 312.

<sup>42</sup> Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, 'Introduction: "Keep Calm and Carry On": The cultural memory of the Second World War in Britain', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, p.2.

have been processed and understood in the years since 1945.<sup>43</sup> However, despite the interest in the war shown by a large and thriving re-enactment community, this expression of popular interest in the past remains overlooked by historians.

This thesis uses the experiences of two re-enactors, Sandra Day and Simon Kerstin, to examine the cultural memory of the war, understood as ‘the product of representations and not of direct experience’.<sup>44</sup> Discussing the cultural memory of the war, Noakes argues that since 1945 certain memories and experiences have been marginalised or emphasised at different moments, shaped as much by the period in which the war is being remembered as by the experience of the war itself.<sup>45</sup> As such, while certain discourses about the war are dominant, such as the experiences of military veterans and the idea of the people’s war, cultural memory is a dynamic, fluid process marked by change and contestation. Re-enacting is a valuable source that makes the process of contestation visible, and has the potential to reveal, ‘the mutual interconnections between public and private that are both most fascinating and most difficult to uncover’.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, film-making as a research tool enables ‘the historian to step beyond the familiar terrain of the archives and engage with the memory of war as it is lived, imagined and spoken’.<sup>47</sup> Sandra’s and Simon’s experiences of portraying a working-class housewife, a Bevin Boy and a road builder have enabled this thesis to reveal the dynamic, fluid, and changing processes involved in cultural memory, especially when personal memory comes into contact with the public.

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<sup>43</sup> Geoff Eley, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (June, 2001), pp. 818-838; Penny Summerfield, ‘War, film, memory: some reflections on war films and the social configuration of memory in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1(1), (2008), pp. 15 - 23; Lucy Noakes, ‘Making histories: Experiencing the Blitz in London’s museums in the 1990s’, in Martin Evans and Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (London: Berg, 1997), pp. 89 - 104; Martin Francis ‘Remembering war, forgetting empire? Representations of the North African campaign in 1950s British cinema’, in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, pp. 111 - 132.

<sup>44</sup> Ann Rigney, ‘Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory’, *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (1) (2005), p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, ‘Introduction’, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> Bradford Vivian, ‘“A Timeless Now”: Memory and Repetition’ in Kendall R Phillips (ed), *Framing Public Memory* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), p. 204.

<sup>47</sup> Bruce C Scates, ‘Manufacturing Memory at Gallipoli’, in Michael Keren and Holger H Herwig (eds.), *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* (London: McFarland, 2009), p. 58.

### 3. Representing film-making as research

Through the case study of *UK Homefront*, this thesis explores film-making as a research tool for historians as well as issues surrounding re-enacting. However, film-making also has an impact on how historians represent the research insights generated through the use of this visual method. As an academic discipline, postgraduate research is conventionally disseminated through a monograph or written thesis.<sup>48</sup> But, as a research method, film-making should be used to reveal new knowledge that could not have been captured or disseminated through conventional means.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, for historians that use film-making as a research tool there is an issue around how they can best represent their research for an academic audience.

This thesis addresses this issue by using both film and prose to discuss different aspects of the research. The film that accompanies the written element of this thesis engages with and represents the aspects of my research that are suited to film as a medium. Visual anthropologists Anna Grimshaw, Amanda Ravetz, and Colin Young argue that film as medium is suited to discussions of certain areas such as sensory and embodied knowledge gained through experiences and actions, and cultural practices rather than abstract subjects or theories.<sup>50</sup> As such, I chose to use the accompanying film to examine the emotional, sensory, and embodied nature of Sandra Day's and Simon Kerstin's re-enacting.

For film-as-research to be successfully used as a means of representing research within history however, the films made by historians need to speak to an academic audience. Again visual anthropology offers a useful way of defining films in this regard. Peter Crawford subdivides ethnographic film into at least seven categories according to differences in form, content, purpose, intended audiences, methods, degree of

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<sup>48</sup> John Tosh with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new direction in the study of modern history: fourth edition* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), p. 147; Marnie Hughes-Warrington, 'Introduction: Theory, Production, Reception', in Marnie Hughes-Warrington (ed.), *The History on Film Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> MacDougall, 'The visual in anthropology', p. 292.

<sup>50</sup> Colin Young, 'Observational Cinema', in Paul Hockings (ed.), *Principle of Visual Anthropology Second Edition* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), p. 108; Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 131.

anthropological relevance, and so on.<sup>51</sup> While Crawford points out that the boundaries between these categories are fluid and films can fall into several categories, two of these categories usefully frame my own use of film-making. One category is ethnographic footage or unedited film material which can be used for research purposes or can eventually be edited into a film. The other category is the research film, ‘edited films made specifically for research purposes and hence not intended for public screening or an audience other than a highly specialized[sic] academic audience’.<sup>52</sup> Both categories of film focus on an academic audience and the generation and representation of new knowledge. My own practice of film-making falls into these two categories and so it is important to consider how historians can use film-making for research purposes *and also* use the footage gathered during the research to make research films that engage with and speak to an academic audience.

Alongside the fifty minute film there is also the written part of this thesis which brings *UK Homefront* into critical dialogue with the academic scholarship on re-enacting, performance, museum studies, and cultural memory, and discusses the more abstract ideas better suited to prose-based discussion.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the written part of this thesis reflects on film-making as a research method and, as Gunn and Faire suggest, is an opportunity to unpack this method, examining the framing of the study and choice of case study as well as the decisions on how to represent research findings generated through this visual approach.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The full list of categories suggested by Crawford are: 1. Ethnographic footage, unedited film material which can be used for research or turned into a film; 2. Research films edited specifically for research purposes and intended for a highly specialised academic audience, rather than a general audience; 3. Ethnographic documentary which is a film which has a specific relevance to anthropology but which is also part of documentary film-making generally, such as cinematic release documentaries aimed at a wide audience; 4. Ethnographic television documentary is a film made by a television company with the intention of reaching a wide non-specialised audience; 5. Education and information films made for educational purposes and meant for classrooms or general audiences; 6. Other non-fiction films including journalistic reports and travelogues; 7. Fiction films that explore a ‘typical’ anthropological subject. Films with history as a subject can map quite usefully onto these categories. See Crawford, ‘Film as discourse’, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> Crawford, ‘Film as discourse’, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Colette Piault, ‘The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project: Researching and Filming’, in Metje Postma and Peter Ian Crawford (eds), *Reflecting Visual Anthropology: using the camera in anthropological research* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006), pp. 360-361.

<sup>54</sup> Gunn and Faire, ‘Introduction: Why Bother with Method?’, pp. 1 - 6.

This thesis addresses these issues in three chapters. Building on many of the themes discussed in this introduction, Chapter One focuses on film-making as a research method and examines the different aspects of the film-making process that I developed during my research. It uses work in visual anthropology to discuss how film-making can be used for research and identifies possible areas of study where historians can fruitfully apply this method, such as public history, memory studies and material culture. It also elaborates on my choice of *UK Homefront* as a case study and examines both the theoretical and practical reasons for focusing on them in this thesis. This chapter also reflects on my use of observational cinema and interviews as a means of generating insights into the embodied knowledge of re-enactors and their relationship to the past in the present. Finally, using work by historians Robert Rosenstone and Alison Landsberg along with work in visual anthropology, this chapter considers the relative advantages of film and prose as communication mediums before turning to the editing strategies which I employed in my research film to convey my insights into *UK Homefront*. This chapter concludes by arguing that whilst the accompanying film explores the aspects of the group's re-enacting best suited to film as a medium, the subsequent two chapters of this written thesis bring the group's practices into dialogue with the academic work on re-enacting and cultural memory.

Chapter Two uses interviews, observational footage, research clips produced during my fieldwork, and scenes from the accompanying film to explore how and why *UK Homefront* re-enact.<sup>55</sup> Using this evidence, I complicate existing arguments on why hobby re-enactors re-enact by demonstrating that hobby re-enactors are motivated both by a desire to educate their audience about the Second World War and their personal passion for recreating the past.<sup>56</sup> This desire informs the subsequent analysis of how the group organise their re-enacting and examines their use of site, authenticity, and space at events so that knowledge can be disseminated effectively. The final section in this chapter examines the performance strategies used by members of the group and argues that the performance strategies are beneficial to the group's pedagogical aims as they

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<sup>55</sup> Research clips and interviews produced during this research can be seen at <https://filmingthepast.wordpress.com>

<sup>56</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 109.

encourage both the re-enactors and the audience to consciously and critically engage with the performance.<sup>57</sup>

Using interviews and the accompanying film as sources, the final chapter considers how Sandra Day's portrayal of a housewife and Simon Kerstin's portrayal of a Bevin Boy and a road builder can illuminate historians' understanding of cultural memory. This chapter first discusses Sandra's portrayal of a working class housewife as an example of a personal intervention into the gendered cultural memory of the Second World War, and one that challenges and contests popular ideas of class and gender during the war.<sup>58</sup> This chapter then turns to Simon's Bevin Boy persona in order to consider the problem of meaning and cultural memory. Using the discussions between Simon and the public captured on film, this section explores the public reception to his re-enactment in order to demonstrate what scholars such as Michael Rothberg and Rebecca Bramall have called the 'multidirectionality' of memory, where a depiction of one aspect of the homefront can be a trigger to remember other historical events and to create new and interesting connections between seemingly unconnected aspects of modern British history.<sup>59</sup> Finally, this chapter uses Simon's portrayal of a Second World War road builder to demonstrate how personal memories need to both engage with the broader social experiences of the war – such as family memories and wartime memories – and fit into the wider popular discourses about the homefront in order to become part of the cultural memory of the war.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>58</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1, (2004), p. 74.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3; Rebecca Bramall, 'Memory, meaning and multidirectionality: "Remembering" austerity Britain', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, p. 202.

<sup>60</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the framework', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 6; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 172 - 173; Noakes and Pattinson, 'Introduction', p. 10.

## Chapter One

### Documentary film-making: a tool of research for historians

This chapter unpacks the film-making process that I developed during my research and makes visible the tacit elements of film-making as method of research. This chapter focuses on four key aspects of this endeavour. The first section draws on visual anthropology to understand what film-making as a method looks like and consider how it can be applied by historians. Using these insights, the second section examines my use of the re-enactment group *UK Homefront* as a case study and unpacks both the practical and theoretical reasons behind this decision. Specifically this section reflects on my decision to use film-making as a tool with which to explore aspects of public history and cultural memory. The third section discusses the film-making method that I used to film *UK Homefront*, examining my use of film-making techniques from observational cinema as well as interviews. Specifically, I address how my research aims led me to use aspects of observational film-making such as shooting, framing, and editing, as well as interviews as part of my film-making method. This section explains how this approach shaped the focus of my film as well as providing a wealth of evidence for the subsequent two chapters in this thesis, which discuss re-enacting practice and memory. Finally, this chapter considers how historians that use film as a research tool can most effectively represent their findings. This section considers the relative advantages of both film and prose as a medium of communication before turning to the editing strategies that I used in my research film to represent my insights into *UK Homefront*. The four sections thus map the film-making process that I used to engage with the written scholarship on re-enacting, public history and memory, and suggests how other historians could use film in their own research.

#### 1. Film-making as research

With its focus on the relative merits of different formal strategies used by filmmakers to disseminate ideas about the past, the existing scholarship within History offers limited

advice about how to use film as a method of research.<sup>1</sup> It is also worth noting that those historians that are beginning to include film-making as part of research projects primarily regard film as a way to disseminate their research findings to a public audience beyond the academy.<sup>2</sup> In similar fashion, the work within film studies interested in history and film-making has focused on the relationship between filmmaker and historian, rather than film-making as a research method *for* historians.<sup>3</sup> In order to develop a framework for how historians can use film-making as a research tool one therefore needs to turn to the scholarship within visual anthropology where there is a substantial body of work that has used film-making as a research method.

The use of film-making by anthropologists has a long history. As early as the 1890s Felix-Louis Regnault and Alfred Cort Haddon used film-making to document ethnographic topics. In 1895 Regnault used film to record the movements of a female Wolof potter from Senegal as part of the 'Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale' in Paris, and in 1898 Haddon used a 'cinematographe' to record a ceremonial dance on the

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of work that focus on how film represents history on screen see: Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006); Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Movie or Monograph? A Historian/Filmmaker's Perspective', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 25 No. 3, (Summer 2003), pp. 45 - 48; Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> This use of film can be understood within the new Impact agenda that is part of the current academic landscape and historians are involved in producing films as part of their research output, a substantive difference to film-making as integral to their research. For a discussion of impact upon academic history see: Pedro Ramos Pinto and Bertrand Taithe, 'Doing history in public? Historians in the age of *impact*', in Pedro Ramos Pinto and Bertrand Taithe (eds.), *The Impact of History? : Histories and the Beginning of the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1 - 21.

<sup>3</sup> Within film studies, there is a growing body of scholarship where filmmaker/researchers are using a practice-led approach in their research. Jouko Aaltonen and Jukka Kortti for instance have used their practice as documentary filmmakers and their film *A Man from the Congo River* (Aaltonen and Kortti, 2010), to examine the relationship between history documentaries and academic historical research. Desmond Bell and Fearghal McGarry have similarly used a practice-based case study of the processes involved in making *The Enigma of Frank Ryan* (Bell, 2012), to discuss how historians and documentary filmmakers can work collaboratively and use the history film as a vehicle for extending historical understanding. The central focus of this scholarship has been built upon the relationship between filmmakers and historians and how film as a medium can convey existing knowledge about the past and as such, offers limited use in thinking about how film can be used as a research tool. See: Jouko Aaltonen and Jukka Kortti, 'From evidence to re-enactment: history, television and documentary film', *Journal of Media Practice*, 16:2, (2015), pp. 108 – 125; Desmond Bell and Fearghal McGarry, 'One cut too many? History and film: A practice-based case study', *Journal of Media Practice*, 14:1, (2014), pp. 5 - 23.



Mer Island in the Torres Straits.<sup>4</sup> In the 1950s anthropologists made films about social events that could provide information about groups or cultures, such as religious rituals or hunting trips, for example Jean Rouch with *Les Maitres Fous* (1955).<sup>5</sup> These films relied on extensive commentary to explain the meaning of the events shown on screen. From the late 1950s onwards however, inspired by the work of observational cinema, as well as the availability of lightweight 16mm cameras and portable and synchronised sound recording, visual anthropologists began to explore how film could be used as an integral part of a research project.

These developments were not a straightforward process, however. Film-making as a tool within anthropology was, and remains, a contentious issue that revolves around the *value* of filmmaking to anthropological knowledge, specifically around the competing claims of analytical and experiential knowledge.<sup>6</sup> As MacDougall describes it, these competing claims have meant that anthropologists have seen human cultures either from the viewpoint of the disinterested social scientist or the indigenous social actor.<sup>7</sup>

From the 1960s to the 1980s debates in anthropology focused on whether visual images and recordings could usefully support observational projects in the social sciences and film-making was seen by many anthropologists as a data collection method that was too subjective, unrepresentative and unsystematic to be of much use. As Pink points out, '[v]isual ethnographers were forced to confront the accusation that their visual images lacked objectivity and scientific rigour'.<sup>8</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, however there was a move within visual anthropology away from the scientific-realist

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<sup>4</sup> Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (California: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 47, 59; Paul Basu, 'Reframing Ethnographic Film', in T Austin and W de Jong (eds.) *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives and Practices* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Another significant example in this field, albeit not made by an anthropologist, is *The Hunters* (John Marshall, 1957).

<sup>6</sup> Pink *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, (London: Sage, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, p. 7.

paradigm and with this a renewed emphasis upon film-making as a ‘sensuous, interpretive, and phenomenologically inflected mode of inquiry’.<sup>9</sup>

At the heart of this new way of thinking was the desire to reframe how anthropologists understood the role of film-making in research projects. Leading filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall called for a ‘shift from word-and-sentence-based anthropological thought to image-and-sequence-based anthropological thought’.<sup>10</sup> Instead of visuals serving the needs of prose, he argued for an approach to anthropology that would:

involve putting in temporary suspension anthropology’s dominant orientation as a discipline of words and rethinking certain categories of anthropological knowledge in the light of understandings that may be accessible only by non-verbal means.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, rather than attempting to incorporate images into a word-based social science MacDougall argued that ‘[v]isual anthropology can never be either a copy of written anthropology or a substitute for it... [f]or that very reason it must develop alternative objectives and methodologies that will benefit anthropology as a whole’.<sup>12</sup>

This insight by MacDougall signalled a shift in how visual anthropologists used film in their research, with a move away from the idea of film as a means of gathering data towards the use of film as a tool that can generate new types of knowledge about areas of anthropological interest. Consequently, anthropologists had to consider what areas of research were best suited to analysis through the method of film-making. Colette Piauult suggests that while theoretically anthropologists can make films about anything it is important to consider if it is the best medium to use. She asks:

is [film] the best medium to convey an analysis of kinship or economic networks?  
It can carry a certain type of information even in these fields but it would probably

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. ix; Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> David MacDougall, ‘The visual in anthropology’, in M. Banks and H. Morphy (eds), *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (London: New Haven Press, 1997), p. 292.

<sup>11</sup> MacDougall, ‘The visual in anthropology’, p. 292.

<sup>12</sup> MacDougall, ‘The visual in anthropology’, pp. 292 – 293.

convey neither the most analytical aspects nor what may appear as contradictory arguments.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than exploring the conventional objects of social scientific inquiry like structures, systems, text, and theory, film-making therefore became a way to produce sensuous, phenomenologically inflected work that explores questions of the body, the senses, experiences, emotion, and skilled practice.<sup>14</sup> Sensory knowledge, difficult to engage with through prose, became a significant area where film-making could produce new insights and understandings.<sup>15</sup> Additionally film also allowed visual anthropologists to share these insights through research films that could ‘render visible the subjective and embodied aspects of human experience so frequently omitted from textual accounts’.<sup>16</sup>

For film-making to be useful research tool however it is important that visual anthropologists ensure that their films are in dialogue with anthropological knowledge. In her discussion of ethnography, Pink argues that the research insight generated through ‘any image or representation is contingent on how it is situated, interpreted and used to invoke meanings and knowledge that are of ethnographic interest’.<sup>17</sup> Thus, visual anthropologists develop film-making methods within an academic discipline rather than within commercial contexts and this means that their methods are designed to improve critical analysis rather than entertain.

Film-making is also a practical act and can impact the research process in a number of ways. The presence of a camera and sound equipment in fieldwork can have

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<sup>13</sup> Piault, ‘The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project: Researching and Filming’, in Postma and Crawford (eds.), *Reflecting Visual Ethnography: Using the camera in anthropological research*, p. 362.

<sup>14</sup> Colin Young, ‘Observational Cinema’, in Paul Hockings (ed.), *Principle of Visual Anthropology Second Edition*. (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), p. 108; Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 4 - 8.

<sup>16</sup> For contributions to the extensive literature on film-making in research see: MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 61-62; MacDougall, ‘The Visual in Anthropology’, p. 292; Sarah Pink, ‘Introduction: Situating Visual Research’ in Pink, Kurti and Afonso (eds), *Working Images: Visual research and representation in ethnography*, p. 5; Cristina Grasseni, ‘Video and ethnographic knowledge: skilled vision in the practice of breeding’, in Pink, Kurti and Afonso (eds), *Working Images: Visual research and representation in ethnography*, pp. 15 – 30; Paul Henley, ‘Putting film to work: Observational cinema as practical ethnography’, in Sarah Pink, Laszlo Kurti and Ana Isabel Afonso (eds.), *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 112; MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, pp. 1 – 4, p. 270.

<sup>17</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, p. 19.

a variety of effects on the relationship between researcher and participant. Most obviously there is the impact that film-making can have in eliciting performativity. The idea of a performance inspired by the presence of the camera does not undermine the value of film-making as a research tool; film-making is a subjective rather than objective practice and is not a means of providing a window onto a world.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it is important to note that the film-making process does not always alter the relationship between the researcher/filmmaker and subject. Indeed, the use of a camera can sometimes have a ‘no more than neutral’ effect on fieldwork.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the camera can provoke performances from the participants that can be extremely useful for research. Paul Henley argues that the presence of the camera can inspire ‘some sort of special performance’ in the participant that ‘can be highly revealing, bringing to light aspects of personal identity, attitude, belief or fantasy that could otherwise remain hidden or unexpressed’.<sup>20</sup>

It is also worth noting that the impact of film-making does not just effect the participants. Film-making can have an intensifying, catalytic effect on conventional fieldwork processes of participant observation; with no second chance the researcher/film-maker has to be focused precisely on what they wish to film and the best way to achieve this is for total immersion in the event.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, for the film to be more than a series of images, the film-maker has to be constantly editorialising, ‘asking themselves which sequences will be necessary to communicate their experience of the world that they are representing and then how one such sequence will influence another’.<sup>22</sup> This process is not a fixed shopping list, but rather a continuous exploratory process with constant revision throughout the period of the shoot. Both these processes of immersion and editorialising encourage a greater attention to those moments where knowledge is embodied in gestures, rituals, or social practices. The act of film-making can therefore produce a deep engagement between film-maker, the participants of the film, and their social and cultural world.

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<sup>18</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, pp. 36 – 38.

<sup>19</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 118.

<sup>20</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, pp. 118 – 119.

<sup>21</sup> Rupert Cox, Andrew Irving and Christopher Wright, ‘Introduction: the sense of the senses’, in Rupert Cox, Andrew Irving and Christopher Wright (eds.) *Beyond text? Critical practices and sensory anthropology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, pp. 117 - 118.

Both *To Live with Herds* (David MacDougall, 1972) and *Mr. Wade* (Anna Grimshaw, 2003) are examples of ethnographic films that use film-making as a method within visual anthropology and that demonstrate its value as a research tool. A landmark in anthropological film-making, *To Live with Herds* documents the conflicting perspectives of the Jie herders of Uganda following the end of British rule and the foundation of the new nation-state. The film uses observational film-making to capture intimate portraits of individual subjects going about their lives and portray the hardships faced by the Jie and their resilience in the face of change. MacDougall frames these encounters with the Jie in a way that presents both his analysis of their situation and allows the audience the possibility for their own interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, this film examines questions of modernization, nationhood, and pastoralism through the use of observational cinema rather than in terms typical of expository documentary or textual anthropology and is thus an example of observational cinema as a means of intellectual inquiry.<sup>24</sup>

Anna Grimshaw's film *Mr. Wade* (2003) is a portrait of a pigeon racer and she uses film-making to research the senses, knowledge, and forms of skilled practice that are integral to this activity. The film follows the protagonist for a year as he looks after his birds, observing how he handles them, how he interprets their sounds and behaviour, as well as detailing the wider web of connections between him and the broader community of fellow racers.<sup>25</sup> Grimshaw uses observational film-making as a means of exploring the non-discursive kinds of knowledge at the heart of this practice and which are nonetheless tangible and meaningful, such as the rhythms of living and working, processes of informal learning, and the embodied meanings of gesture, posture, and the body.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, film-making allowed Grimshaw to examine the implicit, non-discursive ways of knowing embedded in the practice of pigeon racing and communicate them in their own terms rather than translating them into a different conceptual register. Hence, the final piece *Mr. Wade* is not an explanation of pigeon

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<sup>23</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, pp. 82 – 83.

<sup>24</sup> An example of an expository documentary would be *The Hunters* (John Marshall, 1957) which relies on Marshall's narration to explain the events of the film and provide meaning. See: Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> *Mr Wade* (Anna Grimshaw, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, pp. 128 – 129.

racing but is instead an ‘imaginary encounter where knowledge was not understood to be the outcome of experience but rather was constituted *as* experience’.<sup>27</sup>

In summary, the use of film-making in visual anthropology offers a solid foundation with which to develop a film-making-as-research method appropriate for the discipline of history.<sup>28</sup> Film-making is a research tool that can be integral to the research process, engage with and contribute to existing bodies of academic knowledge, and can be capable of generating insights that can only be captured and expressed through the use of film. Significantly, when film-making is used as a research tool, the film portion of the research can sit alongside the written portion as an equal partner in the research output. Finally, film-making is a tool that is not appropriate for all areas of academic interest, but instead is suited to exploring certain areas such as skilled practice and sensory knowledge. Specifically, film-making is a valuable tool for exploring people’s interactions with their material and cultural environment as well as examining how they understand these interactions, both cognitively and sensorially.<sup>29</sup> This understanding of film-making as a method of research informs the choice of case study in this thesis.

## **2. UK Homefront as case study for film-making**

As the scholarship in visual anthropology makes clear, film-making is a research method that is at its most productive when applied to a suitable research area and my first priority in this project was to identify an area within the field of history where film-making would be appropriate to use. However, film-making is a successful method in visual anthropology for the study of lived experiences whereas history is a discipline that can be understood as the study of the past.<sup>30</sup> There is clearly a tension between a method of research suited to the study of the ‘now’ and its application within a discipline interested primarily in the past.

Oral history offers a pathway through this particular obstacle. Like certain modes of documentary film-making and ethnography, ‘[o]ral history is a history built around people’ and consequently there are certain areas of research where oral history is an

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<sup>27</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, p.

<sup>30</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice: second edition* (London: Hodder Education, 2006), p. 1.

appropriate method.<sup>31</sup> Historians have found oral history to be a powerful way of exploring the meaning of historical experience and the relationships between the past and the present.<sup>32</sup> Michael Frisch for example argues that oral history can be:

a powerful tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory – how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.<sup>33</sup>

If one therefore accepts that certain fields within academic history are interested in the present as well as the past, film-making becomes a tool that can at the very least be of use in conducting research into the present uses of the past. This section looks at public history and memory studies as areas particularly suited to film-making as research, as well as suggesting how film can complement the existing methods used by historians to understand ideas such as material culture.<sup>34</sup>

Public history, especially contemporary public history, is one potentially fertile area for film-making as research. Public history is a term that is open to different interpretations. One definition of public history, which is widely held in America, focuses heavily upon the professionalization of the field and this conception of public history tends to focus upon the form and nature of transmission, rather than explore the idea of how the past becomes history.<sup>35</sup> In this view, the emphasis tends to be on the role of professionally trained historians who disseminate and communicate their knowledge about history to the ‘public’.<sup>36</sup> This thesis however prefers to follow Hilda Kean’s

<sup>31</sup> Paul Thompson, ‘The Voice of the Past: Oral history’, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader: Second Edition* (Routledge, London, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Alessandro Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different’ in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader: Second Edition* (Routledge, London, 2006), pp. 32 – 42.

<sup>33</sup> Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> It remains a matter for further research to determine the extent to which film-making can be a tool for research into areas of historical interest that fall outside the designation of the ‘now’, such as sixteenth century British history, or medieval France. A further area to explore would be the use of archival footage as research rather than for representation.

<sup>35</sup> Meg Foster, ‘Review: The Public History Reader’, *Public History Review*, Vol 21 (2014), p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> John Tosh, ‘Public History, Civic Engagement and the Historical Profession in Britain’ *History*, 99: 335, (April, 2014), pp. 191–212.

definition of public history as ‘a process by which the past is constructed into history and a practice which has the capacity for involving people as well as nations and communities in the creation of their own histories’.<sup>37</sup> History, in this sense, is not the preserve of the academic, or solely to be found in the classroom but rather, as Raphael Samuel suggests, ‘a social form of knowledge; the work in any given instance, of a thousand different hands’.<sup>38</sup> Public history is therefore ‘about “making” history as much as “thinking about” history’,<sup>39</sup> and the scholarship on public history has paid particular attention to what public history looks like and the ways in which people connect with the past.<sup>40</sup>

Given that the practices and processes involved in making history are integral to the study of public history, I decided to use film-making to examine public history and illuminate not only the way that people make history but also the motivations of the participants involved in that practice.<sup>41</sup> The existing work on public history reveals how diverse this area of research can be: scholars have used museum practice, collections, memorials, re-enactments, schoolbooks, food, geography and landscapes, films and photographs as sources for work that contributes to issues of gender, class, race, and the hidden histories found outside the traditional archive.<sup>42</sup> With all these options it was a

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<sup>37</sup> Hilda Kean, ‘Introduction’, in Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds.), *The Public History Reader* (Routledge: London, 2013), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory volume one: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Emma Waterton, ‘People and their pasts: public history today’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17:2, (2011), pp. 195-196. See also: Kean, ‘Introduction’, p. 1; Anna Green, ‘Review’, *Oral History*, 37:2, (Autumn 2009), pp. 116 – 117.

<sup>40</sup> The edited collection *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts* for example is primarily concerned with asking ‘what does public history look like?’ See: Hilda Kean, ‘Preface to the Paperback Edition’, in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (eds.), *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2012), p. xv.

<sup>41</sup> Hilda Kean, ‘People, Historians, and Public History: Demystifying the Process of History Making’, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Summer 2010), p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> For example: Megan Elias, ‘Summoning the Food Ghosts: Food History as Public History’, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring 2012), pp. 13-29; Jeannette A Bastian, ‘Records, Memory and Space: Locating Archives in the Landscape’, *Public History Review*, Vol 21 (2014), pp. 45-69; Megan O’Brien Backhouse, ‘Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses: History and Identity’, in Ashton and Kean (eds.) *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts*, pp. 113 – 130; Jon Newman, ‘Harry Jacobs: The Studio and the Visual Archive’, in Ashton and Kean (eds.) *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts*, pp. 260 – 278.



question of choosing a case study that would be particularly conducive for film-making and I decided to focus on re-enactment.<sup>43</sup>

Re-enactment is a term that covers a range of different areas; scholars such as Jerome de Groot and Vanessa Agnew have identified living history museums, technical reconstructions, ‘nostalgia’ toys, literature, film, photography, video games, television shows, pageants, parades, social and cyber groups devoted to historical performance as examples of re-enactment.<sup>44</sup> What they all have in common is a ‘concern with personal experience, social relations, and everyday life, and with conjectural and provisional interpretations of the past’.<sup>45</sup> Thus, re-enactment is an area of research that is particularly well suited to film-making’s ability to account not only for the observable, recordable realities that may be translated into written notes and texts, but also for objects, visual images, the immaterial, and the sensory nature of human experience and knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

Of the different types of re-enactment available to study, I chose to focus specifically on living history re-enacting. Living history is profoundly experiential, with meaning for the re-enactor generated through the ‘doing’ of re-enacting - the embodied practice, the relationship to material culture, and performance, all of which visibly shape the re-enactor’s relationship with the past in the present.<sup>47</sup> These qualities of living history re-enacting are particularly suitable for film-making which is capable of examining both the specific practical processes involved in living history re-enacting as well as the emotional and intellectual meanings generated by re-enactors and their

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<sup>43</sup> I believe that other areas of public history would also have been appropriate for film-making, particularly museums and memorials which have similar dynamics of process, display, material culture and social interactions to re-enacting. It would be interesting for future research to explore other appropriate areas of interest within the broad framework of public history.

<sup>44</sup> For an overview of re-enacting, see: Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 105 - 123; Vanessa Agnew, ‘History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present’, *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 11:3, (2007), p. 300.

<sup>45</sup> Agnew, ‘History’s Affective Turn’, p. 300.

<sup>46</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Katherine M. Johnson, ‘Rethinking (re)doing: historical re-enactment and/as historiography’, *Rethinking History*, 19:2, (2015), 193-206; Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering, ‘From Realism to the Affective Turn: An Agenda’, in Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering (eds), *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Palgrave; Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 1 - 17; Mads Daugbjerg, Rivka Syd Eisner and Britta Timm Knudsen, ‘Re-enacting the past: vivifying heritage “again”’, in Mads Daugbjerg, Rivka Syd Eisner and Britta Timm Knudsen (eds.), *Re-enacting the Past: Heritage, materiality and performance* (Routledge: London, 2016), pp. 1 - 3.

audiences. Furthermore, the focus on practice, material culture, and emotion within the scholarship on re-enactment suggests that potential new insights generated through film-making would be able to meaningfully contribute to existing critical debates.

In turn, I decided to concentrate my research on Second World War re-enactors. Second World War re-enacting is by some estimation the fastest growing contemporary form of re-enacting in Britain and there are numerous re-enactment groups currently practicing within the United Kingdom.<sup>48</sup> From a practical perspective, the popularity of this form of re-enacting made it likely that I would be able to find a group interested in working with me on my project. Furthermore, my own academic background is in modern British history and I prior to this thesis I was particularly interested in the memory of the Second World War in Britain. With this initial focus, I began my search for a re-enactment group to be the case study for my thesis.

I first encountered the *UK Homefront* on-line when they appeared towards the top of an Internet search for ‘Second World War re-enactment group’. The brief accompanying description alongside the link to their website suggested that they were a living history group that portrays the ordinary working men and women of the British homefront.<sup>49</sup> Intrigued by their decision to focus on the homefront rather than the military I went to see the group at their next event, a 1940s weekend at York Racecourse in April 2012. The event had tea dancing, antiques and ephemera stalls as well as re-enactors and I found the group amongst the stallholders, displaying their collection of Second World War artefacts and speaking to the public about different aspects of the British homefront. From the subjects of the display to the discussions between the members of the group and the public it was clear that *UK Homefront* placed the working-class, civilian experiences of the homefront at the heart of their re-enacting. Furthermore, the even split between men and women in the group suggested that the role of women during the war was important to how they thought about and portrayed the homefront. This approach to the war was unusual and intriguing; the focus for many Second World War re-enactors in Britain is on the military and typically the German,

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<sup>48</sup> According to a leading re-enactment organization, the Second World War is the fastest growing area of re-enacting in Britain in the past ten years. See: <http://www.eventplan.co.uk/page29.html> (accessed 14 May 2015).

<sup>49</sup> See: [https://www.google.co.uk/?gfe\\_rd=cr&ei=J\\_6FWI\\_4AZPFaPPPjtAK#q=second+world+war+re+enactment+groups](https://www.google.co.uk/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=J_6FWI_4AZPFaPPPjtAK#q=second+world+war+re+enactment+groups) (accessed 10 March 2012).

British and American forces are the most popular to re-enact.<sup>50</sup> *UK Homefront's* emphasis on the civilian experience of the war, on class, and on gender, suggested a promising case study for my thesis.

At a subsequent event at Chesterfield Museum, I spoke to Ian and Sandra Day about my project and discussed the possibility of making a film about the group that would explore how and why they re-enact. Both responded positively to the idea and introduced me to the other members of the group who were equally receptive to the project. From there, I began to film with the group, attending events, getting to know the different members and better understand their practice. These first encounters with the group were important as they helped me to identify potential areas of academic interest that my research could engage with as well as resolve how I could practically accomplish the aims of my thesis.

From the perspective of my research, I was struck by the role that artefacts played in group's re-enacting; material culture figured prominently both in terms of displays and the re-enactors own attire. This is an important focus of academic research on living history and work by Gapps and Mads Daugbjerg has discussed the importance of material culture to how people engage with the past through re-enacting.<sup>51</sup> Film-making however suggested a means of negotiating some of the issues that historians have identified with the study of material culture. As Alan Mayne points out, whilst it has proven useful to 'read' objects as texts, metaphors of text 'threaten to collapse the

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<sup>50</sup> There is no definitive list of Second World War re-enactment groups currently active in Britain, either military focused or civilian. However, various websites offer ideas about the number of groups. For example, the website [www.wwiireenacting.co.uk](http://www.wwiireenacting.co.uk) lists 42 re-enactment groups focused on the Second World War, all of which portray different elements of the military forces engaged in the war. A similar website, [www.friendsofthe40s.com](http://www.friendsofthe40s.com), however, lists over 80 re-enactment groups focused on the Second World War and of that number a dozen or so portray aspects of the homefront with the home guard featuring most prominently.

The popularity of the military in Second World re-enacting was also reflected in my own experiences at re-enactment events where I found that the majority of re-enactors portrayed soldiers. Re-enactors portraying aspects of the homefront were comparatively uncommon and groups specialising on this area even more so; during my fieldwork *UK Homefront* were the only re-enactment group that I encountered to re-enact the general civilian experience of the war.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Gapps, 'Mobile monuments: A view of historical reenactment and authenticity from inside the costume cupboard of history', *Rethinking History*, 13:3, (2009), pp. 395 - 409; Mads Daugbjerg, 'Patchworking the past: materiality, touch and the assembling of 'experience' in American Civil War re-enactment', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20:7-8, (2014), pp. 724 - 741.

multiple dimensions of sensory experience that are the essence of things that have been shaped and trafficked through human intervention'.<sup>52</sup> Objects have non-textual qualities: they are tactile, they can trigger imagination, and they create their significance through interactions with people, places, and other objects, rather than through anything intrinsic or inherent.<sup>53</sup> Film-making could help to capture and communicate the sensory nature of objects and offer new insights into the role of material culture in re-enacting.

The focus on a Second World War re-enactment group also allowed my research to engage with an additional critical context, specifically the contemporary memory of the Second World War in Britain. There is a rich and diverse body of academic work on the cultural memory of the Second World in Britain, which has used sources such as films, ephemera, museum displays, television shows, photographs, songs, memorials, and websites to discuss what the cultural memory can reveal about issues such as gender, race, and empire.<sup>54</sup> However, despite its popularity in twenty-first-century Britain, Second World War re-enacting has received almost no previous academic scrutiny. *UK Homefront* presented an excellent opportunity to address this gap in the scholarship and interrogate how the group used their re-enacting to remember the war.

Alongside the intellectual reasons for using *UK Homefront* as a case study, practical concerns about the use of film-making were also significant. Most obviously, film-making is a technical skill: it requires considerable experience and aptitude to be able to use film-making as a tool for research.<sup>55</sup> When I began this project, my own experience of making a film consisted of working on a ten-minute fiction film as part of a taught postgraduate course and auditing another postgraduate film-making course. In order to successfully interrogate film-making as a research tool I therefore needed to

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Mayne, 'Material Culture', in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (eds), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 54 - 55.

<sup>53</sup> Mayne, 'Material Culture', p. 55.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Penny Summerfield, 'Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War, 1939–60', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22, 3, (2011), pp. 330 – 353; Geoff Eley, 'Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II', *The American Historical Review*, vol 106, No. 3 (June, 2001), pp. 818-838; assorted essays in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> The combination of technical expertise and academic training required to use film as a research tool can at least partly explain the absence of film-making from the historian's methodological toolbox. For a discussion of the technical skills required to use film-making as a research method see: Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, pp. 53 - 78.

find a case study that would allow me time to develop the technical skills necessary to produce a work that would demonstrate the benefits of film as a tool for research.

The technical skills required for intimate film-making are further compounded by the typically solo approach to research within academic history, which contrasts with film-making as an industry practice where there is typically a minimum of a two-person crew for documentary film-making and an editor who works on the project in conjunction with the director.<sup>56</sup> Thus, solo film-making of a high quality is technically extremely demanding. Where a one-man crew is beneficial however is that it enables the film-maker to form a close relationship with the subject of their film and create an intimate portrait of their experiences. Consequently, despite practical and technical issues, solo film-making can be well suited to making research films.

Another practical concern with film-making is financial. Funding is an issue for all research projects but with film-making the cost of the basic equipment required to make a film can be prohibitive for the individual and a significant barrier to entry. Whilst the cost of film-making has dramatically decreased with the advance in digital film equipment and online editing software, the costs are still significant and are potentially more than other established methods within academic history, especially if one requires additional support in either the filming or editing of the research.<sup>57</sup> Without the financial support of both the University of Manchester and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) using film as a research tool for this thesis would have been almost impossible. Even with this support budget played a significant role in deciding my film's focus.

*UK Homefront* offered a solution to these practical factors. Based in the North of England, I was able to spend considerable time with the group throughout the four years of this project. For my first year of research I had the opportunity to develop my skills by filming members of the group, reviewing and critiquing the rushes (the raw footage taken at events) and going back to film the same people again. Practically this meant

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<sup>56</sup> Marilyn Gaunt, 'From Eight-Man Crew to One-Woman Band: My life in television', in Austin and de Jong (eds.) *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives and Practices*, p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> For this project, the cost of the film equipment was around £7,000 and editing software and computer was £3,000. Without access to this equipment through the University of Manchester, it would have been impossible to produce a similar quality research film.

that the more time I spent filming the group the more technically proficient I became.<sup>58</sup> This access to the group also allowed me to develop and refine my observational film-making approach, discussed in the following section of this chapter.

In addition, the repetitive process of re-enacting allowed me to manage the technical challenges of film-making; if a scene shot at one event did not work for technical reasons (such as a faulty microphone or poor camerawork) I was able to recapture similar material at a subsequent event. Furthermore, the location of the group's events and their willingness to participate in this project also meant that I was able to spend a significant period with the group, liberated from the pressures of gathering all my research footage within a brief period. More importantly for my research, the ability to spend a significant amount of time with the group allowed me to identify key moments that spoke directly to areas of academic interest, such as Simon's portrayal of a road builder during the war and questions of cultural memory (discussed in detail in Chapter Three).<sup>59</sup>

It is finally worth noting that the group placed very few restrictions on what I was able to film, a potential issue for using film-making to look at aspects of public history within a more established institution such as a museum or heritage site.<sup>60</sup> A case study that was more demanding in terms of access and technical skill would have been a significant barrier to achieving the research aims of this project. Practical factors affect all research projects but given the potential 'newness' of film-making to historians it is important to both recognise the influence that they had on this project and that they can have on any future research that use film-making. In this sense, *UK Homefront* can be seen as a test subject, chosen both because they allow this thesis to explore how film-

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<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting that I did not use any of the footage captured in my first year in my final output. Instead, the majority of scenes in the film came from the end of my second year of working with the group and onwards. For example, the scenes involving Simon at re-enactment events and the interview with Sandra at home were filmed during the third year of my research.

<sup>59</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War: History, Memory and the UK Homefront* (Ben Knowles, 2016), 26.10 - 33.15, 42.49 - 46.28.

<sup>60</sup> An indication of the potential problems that can arise when there are issues around access occurred during filming at Brodsworth Hall, run by English Heritage. Sandra was walking around the venue and sharing her opinions and after five minutes a member of the staff asked me to stop filming because of issues with access. Fortunately I had gathered enough material by this point but had I been stopped sooner a revealing scene about Sandra's relationship with a heritage site would have been lost. This incident illustrates the importance of access to a research project that relies on observing events as they unfold.

making can be used to generate new research into an appropriate area of historical research *but also* because of the practical benefits of working with the group.

### 3. Film-making as a method for historians

For this project, it was important to use film-making techniques suited to generating insights into the re-enactment practices of different members of *UK Homefront*. During my fieldwork I decided to use techniques from observational cinema as well as interviews in order to understand how and why *UK Homefront* re-enact, as well as their relationship with history, heritage sites, and the Second World War. This section examines my two main film-making methods and first discusses my use of film-making techniques from observational cinema before turning to my use of interviews. This section illuminates the choices made in response to the needs of my emergent research questions and the demands of *UK Homefront* as a case study.

Prior to beginning a research project, however it is not always apparent how specific film-making methods will be appropriate for particular research contexts.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the experience of most visual anthropologists suggests that they develop visual research methods for, and within, specific projects, and often in response to factors such as fieldwork conditions, emergent research questions, and the relationship between researcher and subject.<sup>62</sup> As such, research films are often a hybrid of pertinent techniques which resist categorisation as a single type of documentary, such as purely observational or reflexive, and are instead a productive mix of different techniques.<sup>63</sup> This is certainly the case with my own approach, which developed during my fieldwork and as the focus of my research became more certain. Therefore, instead of viewing this section as a blueprint for future film-making as research within history, this section looks to increase understanding into both how I made my research film *as well as* how film-making as a method can be used by other historians.

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<sup>61</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, p. 30.

<sup>62</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, pp 3 – 4; Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Methodologies* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 2; L. Josephides, 'Representing the anthropologist's predicament' in W. James, J. Hockey and A. Dawson (eds), *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of different documentary modes see: Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 1 - 41.

### 3.1 Observational Cinema

I wanted to use film to explore *UK Homefront*'s re-enacting, to capture the processes involved in their participation at re-enactment events and to examine their relationship with members of the public, material culture and the history of the Second World War. Of the documentary film-making approaches available to me, observational cinema offered me a film-making technique that was best suited to examining these areas. Paul Henley explains that:

At the core of [observational cinema] lies the idea that through the rigorous observation of the minutiae of social events and interactions, it is possible to gain significant insights, not just into idiosyncratic personal motivations of the immediate subjects, but also into broader social and cultural realities of their social world.<sup>64</sup>

As a mode of inquiry, observational cinema offers a way of tracing the different physical, emotional, and intellectual relationships that emerge during re-enactment events between the re-enactors, the public, material culture, the present, and the past. For this thesis, I chose elements of observational film-making that would support my research aims as a historian, rather than visual anthropologist. This section therefore discusses the aspects of observational film-making that I used in my research to generate insights into *UK Homefront*.

Prior to discussing my own approach, it is helpful to contextualise observational cinema, both within film-making and visual anthropology. Observational cinema is a mode of documentary film-making that developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s as changes in technology allowed filmmakers to adopt a 'fly on the wall' approach to their subjects. Prior to the 1950s documentary film-making mainly consisted of the expository mode of documentary that used a direct-address style, or 'voice of god' narrator, to address the audience and provide the film with a compelling narrative logic. This mode is most famously associated with the documentary movement that emerged in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s under the guidance of John Grierson, with films such as *Night Mail* (Basil Wright, 1936) and *A Diary for Timothy* (Humphrey Jennings,

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<sup>64</sup> Henley, 'Putting film to work', p. 101.



1945). As well as being poetic and evocative, these films were overwhelmingly didactic and concerned with social issues, such as housing or welfare.<sup>65</sup>

In the 1950s changes to technology allowed filmmakers to leave the studio and record sound and vision synchronously, allowing filmmakers to make films that had an immediacy and a directness that was previously impossible.<sup>66</sup> These new films were interested in ‘capturing people in action, and letting the viewer come to conclusions about them unaided by any complicit or explicit commentary’.<sup>67</sup> Called Direct Cinema in the United States and Cinéma Vérité in Europe, this new observational style of film-making was pioneered by the likes of Frederick Wiseman with *Titicut Follies* (1967), the Maysles Brothers with *Salesman* (1968), and the French filmmaker Jean Rouch with *Chronique d’un Ete* (1960), who all used observational film-making as way of exploring the everyday.<sup>68</sup>

Subsequent film-makers however, critical of the passive and objective ideal espoused by Direct Cinema film-makers such as Don Pennebaker, have moved away from the puritanism of early observational cinema to use elements of observational practice alongside more obtrusive filmic elements such as interviews.<sup>69</sup> A shift in documentary practice in the late 1950s and early 1960s also occurred in visual anthropology where the new approach to film-making practiced within observational cinema represented an important break with earlier models of anthropological film-making that used filmed material to illustrate an accompanying narration.<sup>70</sup> This new observational approach offered anthropologists ‘a method of examining human

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<sup>65</sup> For a recent contribution to the extensive literature on the documentary movement in Britain see: Scott Anthony and James G Mansell, ‘The Documentary Film Movement and the Spaces of British Identity’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 23, issue 1, (2012), pp. 1 – 99. See also: Bill Nichols, ‘The Voice of Documentary’, *Film Quarterly*, 36, 3 (Spring, 1983), p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Basu, ‘Reframing Ethnographic Film’, pp. 95 – 96.

<sup>67</sup> Nichols, ‘The Voice of Documentary’, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> For the extensive literature on Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité see: Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane, ‘Chapter 14: Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité, 1960 – 1970’, in *A New History of Documentary Film* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 208 – 226; Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (London: BFI, 2008); Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge 2000), p. 68.

<sup>69</sup> Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, pp. 67 - 73.

<sup>70</sup> Young, ‘Observational Cinema’, p. 65; Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, ‘Rethinking Observational Cinema’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Sep, 2009), p. 539.

behaviour and human relationships in detail'.<sup>71</sup> However, unlike the documentaries made within the film or television industry, visual anthropologists could refine methods used in observational cinema to meet the needs of the academic community. Consequently, observational film-making methods developed by visual anthropologists were designed for improving the quality of research rather than meeting the commercial and artistic aims of filmmakers working outside of an academic context.

Observational film-making as a method has been contested and complicated by developments within visual anthropology. As early as the 1950s Jean Rouch was using an interactive approach in his film-making, provoking responses from his participants in order to generate insights into their worlds. MacDougall has also been critical of the tendency that observational cinema has to obscure the presence of the filmmaker and has urged filmmakers to respond to this criticism by developing a more participatory or reflexive mode of documentary.<sup>72</sup> There have also been concerns about the potential passivity of film-makers working within the observational mode, with the suggestion that they capture what happens rather than actively searching for meaning in an event.<sup>73</sup>

In response to these criticisms, new methods and approaches have emerged out of observational cinema and there are numerous films that are both reflexive and participatory, such as Johannes Sjöberg's film *Transfiction* (2007).<sup>74</sup> These films have looked to resolve the issues of observational cinema by addressing the dynamic between film-maker and participants and using film to explore the unobservable, such as the imagination. Nevertheless, observational cinema remains a widespread approach within visual anthropology and has much to offer my own research into re-enacting, such as practices and processes, the sensory, and material culture.

In my own research, an observational style of film-making had an immediate and, for the historian unfamiliar with this approach, a perhaps unexpected impact by significantly shaping the questions that my thesis was able to explore. In observational cinema the mandate for filming should come from the subjects, not just from preconceptions of the subjects introduced by the filmmaker; film-making in this mode is

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<sup>71</sup> Young, 'Observational Cinema', p. 67.

<sup>72</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 85 - 89.

<sup>73</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 85 - 89.

<sup>74</sup> *Transfiction* (Johannes Sjöberg, 2007). For a discussion of the practices involved in making this film see: Johannes Sjöberg, 'Ethnofiction: drama as a creative research practice in ethnographic film', *Journal of Media Practice*, 9:3, (2008), pp. 229-242.

‘a process of inquiry in which knowledge is not prior but emerges and takes distinctive shape’.<sup>75</sup> Following this approach, the film-maker must respond to the possibilities available during the fieldwork, rather than imposes their own abstract interests upon the film. As Grimshaw and Ravetz emphasise, observational cinema is a ‘fluid process shaped through the intervention of subjects, the interruption of unexpected or spontaneous events’ and extended, long-term relationships between film-maker and participants.<sup>76</sup> For historians this has a direct impact on how to approach and use a source or case study when using film as a research tool.

Responding to the participants in your film is not a passive practice. I certainly did not arrive at a re-enactment event, camera in hand, and begin to film members of the group indiscriminately. Giving the participants the mandate for the research also does not mean that my observations of the group were uninformed by the scholarship on re-enactment, public history and memory. Observational film-making for research does not, as Piauxt points out, ‘escape from the necessity to define a project, its aims and its processes, to imagine the future film’.<sup>77</sup> Instead, the researcher/film-maker needs to be able to respond to the possibilities of unpredictable events or aspects that occur during film-making and understand how they present insights into the film’s critical context.

During filming, I needed to identify and respond to moments that were significant to my research interests, such as the cultural memory of the Second World War or the performance practice of hobby re-enactors. It was only by being sensitive to these moments that I was able to capture the material necessary to create scenes in my film that could meaningfully engage with this academic work. For example, when I was filming Simon at Ellesmere Port where he was showing his Road Up display for the first time it soon became clear that his display was failing to connect with his audience who understandably kept trying to process the display in terms of the Blitz.<sup>78</sup> So rather than focusing my film-making upon the other possible narratives available to me, I concentrated my on the element of the event that spoke to my research interest in how parts of the war were remembered or, in this case, forgotten. While an audience can read

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<sup>75</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, ‘Introduction: Visualizing Anthropology’, in Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz (eds.), *Visualising Anthropology* (Bristol: Intellect, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, pp. 8 - 9.

<sup>77</sup> Piauxt, ‘The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project’, p. 358.

<sup>78</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 26.10 - 33.15, 42.49 - 46.28.

other aspects of my research in these scenes of Simon's Road Up display (such as the spatial dimension of his performance discussed in Chapter 2), the film frames his display as an exploration of the cultural memory of the war (discussed in Chapter 3).

Being open to possible areas of research during fieldwork was however harder to do in practice than in theory and initially I went to events armed with questions about memory, class, and re-enacting. I was effectively planning to use film to tell rather than show re-enactors relationship with these largely abstract notions. I soon found however that the list of questions based on the secondary literature was a barrier to working with the group; I recorded numerous interviews that followed my own preconceived ideas about what they were doing and which offered only occasional, superficial insights. It was only when I stopped worrying about these pre-conceived ideas that I could appreciate how, for instance, the group negotiated ideas of performance in a complex and nuanced fashion that involved their motivation to re-enact, the spaces that they were in and the nature of their discussions with audiences. And perhaps this is not such a different approach to historians that respond to the quirks of an archive that can lead them in an unexpected yet fruitful direction. As John Tosh suggests, it is important that researchers avoid too single minded a preoccupation with a narrow set of issues and that the 'relationship between the historian and his or her sources is one of give and take'.<sup>79</sup>

Once the film-maker has identified the research areas that the film's subject engages with observational cinema is capable of capturing an intimate and revealing view of people's world. Like all methods, there are certain techniques that enable this approach to 'bring into focus the rational and experience-rich character of a lifeworld'.<sup>80</sup> The camera should be highly mobile, freed from the restrictions of tripods, and able to follow the actions of the subject as well as the event as they occur.<sup>81</sup> The reason for this is a desire to convey a sense of the film-maker's subjective experience of 'being there' by showing certain moments of that experience in their entirety. Observational film-making is not a passive practice and Colin Young explains that for the approach to work successfully the filmmaker 'cannot afford... to stand back and get distant panoramas of

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<sup>79</sup> John Tosh with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new direction in the study of modern history: fourth edition* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), p. 90.

<sup>80</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, pp. 134 - 135.

<sup>81</sup> Piauxt, 'The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project', p. 358.

human behaviour – you have to be close to it and follow it intimately’.<sup>82</sup> This requires the filmmaker to move around an event, providing the audience with the context of the event as well as focusing on important details that can help to identify and communicate significant moments.<sup>83</sup> For example, the scene of Sandra walking around Brodsworth Hall was only possible because of a mobile camera capable of following Sandra. This allowed me to capture her experience of the hall, how she negotiated the space, and interpreted this type of heritage site in terms of class and gender.

To achieve a degree of intimacy there also needs to be a large amount of trust between participants and filmmaker and this develops over time. Consequently, observational film-making is best suited to extended periods of fieldwork. In my experience, as my relationship with members of group developed I was able to better explore the more personal and intimate aspects of why members re-enact; it was only in the last months of filming that Simon discussed the role that the break-up of his marriage played in his re-enacting.

In observational cinema, the film-maker should also use long takes whenever possible in order to preserve the integrity of events in the wholeness in which they spontaneously occurred. This not only captures the sense of an event but it also allows the participants to express and explain themselves, through actions, gestures, words, and meaningful silences.<sup>84</sup> Long takes are, for Grimshaw and Ravetz, ‘a way of bringing into focus the relational and experience-rich character of the lifeworld’.<sup>85</sup> Importantly, long takes allow the film-maker to *show* rather than tell about a process and as the group’s practice and their experiences at events became an increasingly important focus of my research this style of film-making became increasingly useful. For instance, with fluid camera work and a long take, the scene in the film of Simon talking to two members of the public about his Bevin Boy display allowed me to capture the spatial dynamics of the event, as well as the interactions between Simon, the audience and his display.<sup>86</sup>

Filming in long takes also allowed me access to the complexity of meaning that members of the group invested in aspects of re-enacting such as the material culture of

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<sup>82</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, ‘Rethinking Observational Cinema’, p. 540.

<sup>83</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 114.

<sup>84</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 114.

<sup>85</sup> Anna and Ravetz, ‘Rethinking Observational Cinema’, p. 521, pp. 538 - 556.

<sup>86</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 26.10 - 33.15, 42.49 - 46.28.

the Second World War or their own identity. Some of the most fruitful moments in the film came when Sandra and Simon reflected upon why an event, object, or action was particularly meaningful to them and their audiences. For example, when Simon discusses the respirator that he brought for his ARP display he begins by attempting to explain its meaning before trailing off. He remains silent as he handles the respirator and contemplates its significance. It is only after a few moments with the object that he manages to come close to articulating his emotional and sensory relationship with it and even when he vocalises what the object means to his relationship to the past his facial expression, his gestures and his hesitancy reveal how difficult he finds it to verbalise this relationship. Without a long take and a mobile camera able to focus upon the different elements that form this scene the complex sensory nature of re-enactors' relationship with material culture would have been difficult to capture.

How the camera frames the participants in the film is also vital. MacDougall warns that whilst a shot proves that a participant exists, the way that they are framed in that shot means that they become a, 'certain kind of man, a character created not by a script but by framing and editing'.<sup>87</sup> An effective way of minimising the impact of framing is through a sensitive use of cinematography, employing an 'unprivileged' single camera that offers the audience the viewpoint of a normal human participant in the events.<sup>88</sup> Framing participants in this way is a renunciation of stylistic privilege and is an attempt to narrow the distance between the filmmaker and the participants. During filming, I followed this approach wherever possible in an effort to create intimacy between the participants and the audience and communicate the affective engagement with the past at the heart of re-enacting. Furthermore, the unprivileged camera style was particularly important as it offered me a way of bridging the cultural divide between amateur re-enactors and academic historians who, as de Groot acknowledges, can often be condescending towards re-enacting.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 42.

<sup>88</sup> Unprivileged single camera style is defined by MacDougall as, 'an assertion of the obvious: that filmmakers are human, fallible, rooted in physical space and society, governed by chance, limited in perception – and that films must be understood this way'. See MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 265.

<sup>89</sup> Jerome de Groot, 'Affect and empathy: re-enactment and performance as/in history', *Rethinking History*, 15:4, (2011), pp. 587 - 588.

The observational approach was also a means of understanding the role of sensory knowledge in re-enacting. Again in the scene of Simon discussing the Bevin Boys with the public, the camera moves from a wide of the group that situates them within their physical environment to close ups of Simon, the members of the public, and the objects that are inspiring their discussions such as the safety pin and replica dynamite stick.<sup>90</sup> Gestures, touches, and small moments are magnified through the observational technique of framing and the intimacy required by this approach. The camera explores Simon and the public's embodied experience of the event, how they perceive their environment, how they engage with it emotionally and bodily, as well as how they engage with each other. Through close ups of the objects in situ and during handling by both Simon and his audience the role of touch in connecting people to the past is emphasised. Furthermore, as the camera follows Simon's movements as he physically enacts how miners would have used the safety pin, the film draws attention to how his understanding of the history of the Bevin Boy is sensory and embodied as well as cognitive. As a method, film-making illuminates the complex relationship that re-enactors and their audiences have with ideas of the past.

It is also important to acknowledge the physical aspect of observational film-making and the impact this can have on research. After all, the film-maker is not invisible and the introduction of a camera into a space can be obtrusive. Throughout the course of the fieldwork members of the group were aware of my presence, both visually but also physically, especially when they had radio microphones attached to them or the camera within a meter of them. As Henley notes, the presence of a camera can a variety of effects, from either a minimal impact on a participant to eliciting a performance that can be highly revealing.<sup>91</sup>

In my fieldwork, I found that the impact of the camera on a member of the group was often reduced through familiarity and the relationship that we developed. Certainly, the more superficial responses to the presence of the camera, such as nervousness or embarrassment, disappeared after a handful of events where I was present with the

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<sup>90</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 26.10 - 33.15.

<sup>91</sup> Henley, 'Putting film to work', pp. 118 – 119.

camera.<sup>92</sup> Simon in particular was initially nervous about being filmed and interestingly wanted to restrict interactions on camera to interviews about his re-enacting. This relationship developed to the extent that he was comfortable to speak to me at home about personal experiences and would often ask me if he needed to be ‘mic’d up’ when I was filming him.

Where the camera did provoke a noticeable performance however was by nudging participants to reflect on their own practice and their relationship with the past. Encouraged by both the camera and myself as audience, members of the group were more likely to explore their own behaviour and attempt to explain them in terms of their identity, sense of history, and so on. Often these moments of reflection would come during an action that I was observing, and unprovoked by any question. The re-enactor, engaged with setting up their display or finishing a conversation with a member of the public, would feel compelled to explain and make sense of what they were doing or reflect on how they felt.<sup>93</sup> These moments of reflection were, in my experience, enhanced by the presence of the camera and during the fieldwork I felt that the participants would often speak for the benefit of an imagined audience for the film, rather than for me as a researcher.

Additionally, it is important to note that observational film-making, with its reliance on recording events as they occur, helps the researcher to continually focus during their fieldwork, with observational film-making serving as a ‘tool for refining the ethnographer’s attention, for monitoring and aiding the training of the eye’.<sup>94</sup> In short, film-making can have an intensifying, catalytic effort on the process of observation as the film-maker looks to capture precisely what they want to film and how to best convey this insight through their film-making technique.<sup>95</sup> Viewing an event through the lens of a camera can, in my experience, produce a type of sustained looking that heightens one’s engagement and is of considerable benefit to the film-maker historian in

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<sup>92</sup> The speed with which the re-enactors became comfortable around the camera and myself is perhaps a reflection on the nature of a hobby that lends itself to extrovert behaviour. In my more general experiences of film-making I have found most people become comfortable with the presence of the camera within hours rather than days, and, if not directly addressed on camera, the presence of the camera can be forgotten within minutes.

<sup>93</sup> An instance of this reflection can be seen with Simon at Colwyn Bay talking to the public about aspects of his display. See: [www.filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/](http://www.filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/)

<sup>94</sup> Grasseni, ‘Video and ethnographic knowledge’, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 117.



understanding and reflecting on the subject of their attention.<sup>96</sup> In particular this sustained looking encouraged my own reflections on the embodied knowledge involved in re-enacting physical processes such as washing, as well as the sensory aspect of a re-enactor's relationship to the past expressed through the handling and touching of material culture. These moments were important to meaningfully capture on film and to show and reflect upon in the accompanying film.

The editing process in turn helps to produce new insights into the subject of the film. For Henley,

[e]diting affords an opportunity for a second participative immersion in the events, particularly if one has shot the material according to the observational norms, i.e. long, considered takes, shot in an unprivileged style from the point of view of a normal human observer.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, the search through the rushes for a narrative can also produce additional knowledge for the film-maker as they learn new things about the footage that they shot. This new knowledge can also consist of abstract insights that derive simply from the repeated viewing of the rushes, or from the juxtaposition of sequences during the editing process. In my own practice, I found that insights produced through editing informed written element of my thesis as well as the accompanying film, particularly my analysis of the group's approach to performance and space discussed in the following chapter.

### 3.2 Interviews

Despite its controversial status in observational cinema where the ethos is to show, not tell, the use of interviews is the other significant element of my film-making method.<sup>98</sup> In documentary film-making there are a variety of different approaches to the interview which can vary from a casual filmed encounter between filmmaker and participant that produces a conversational exchange, to a formal, carefully staged set-up that follows a

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<sup>96</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, pp. 111 – 112.

<sup>97</sup> Henley, 'Putting film to work', p. 118.

<sup>98</sup> For a detailed discussion of the debates around the use of interviews in observational cinema see: Paul Henley, 'Are you happy? Interviews, "conversations" and "talking heads" as methods for gathering oral testimony in ethnographic documentary' in Joachim Wossidlo and Ulrich Roters, eds. *Film und Interview. Volkskundliche und ethnologische Ansätze zu Methodik und Analyse*, (Berlin, 2003), pp. 51 - 67.

preconceived schedule of questions.<sup>99</sup> Oral historians have also noted the variation possible in interviews and Alistair Thompson points out that there are ‘many different styles of interviewing, ranging from the friendly, informal conversational approach to the more formal, controlled style of questioning’.<sup>100</sup> During my film-making I consciously used two types of interview: a formal, controlled interview that I principally used with Sandra and Simon at their homes;<sup>101</sup> and conversational, typically between myself and members of the group during re-enacting events and can be found throughout the film, for example prior to Sandra going to look around Brodsworth Hall or after Simon has spoken to the public about the role of the Bevin Boys in the war.<sup>102</sup>

Interviews offer the film-maker a number of practical benefits for both their research and their output. Interviews are a useful way of making fieldwork notes and the interviews I conducted were invaluable in allowing me to revisit my fieldwork during various stages of my research and think about the group’s re-enacting in more abstract terms. A number of these interviews inform the following two chapters in this thesis, where I discuss *UK Homefront* both in terms of why they re-enact as well as what their practice can tell us about the cultural memory of the war. Interviews can also provide films with the footage necessary to provide context and create coherence for an audience.<sup>103</sup> For example, interviews with Sandra and Simon allowed me to introduce their backgrounds, suggest what motivated them to re-enact and provide context around a display. These interviews were a practical way of framing scenes so that they were intelligible for an audience.

There are however theoretical issues to address when using interviews as part of a film-making method. For historians the interview can seem like the logical starting point for a film-making project. Not only does the use of interview offer a point of continuity between established methods in oral history and the new approach of film-making, interviews in oral history have had a profound effect on how historians write

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<sup>99</sup> It is worth noting Bill Nichols’ view that the interview is a ‘distinct form of social encounter’, different from ordinary conversation because of the institutional framework in which interviews occur and the guidelines that structure them. I believe that this is a prescriptive interpretation of the filmed interview and does not account for the range of approaches. See Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 121-122; Paul Henley, ‘Are you happy?’ p. 51.

<sup>100</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 222.

<sup>101</sup> For example see *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 2.33 - 2.42 and 10.42 - 13.01.

<sup>102</sup> For example see *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 3.01 - 4.04 and 16.48 - 17.10.

<sup>103</sup> Henley, ‘Are you happy?’, p. 55.

history. Rather than an outside perspective on an experience or a community oral history gives people a voice and a dignity within a project. As Thompson suggests, '[t]he use of oral evidence breaks through the barriers between the chroniclers and their audiences; between the educational institutions and the outside world'.<sup>104</sup> For the historian interested in the sometimes-alien world of re-enactment, an interview seems like an obvious tool to make sense of their world. For the historian filmmaker however the interview is just one available tool and by using them in my own research, they created tensions with my own observational approach which looked to reveal how the members of UK Homefront re-enacted, rather than have them tell me how they re-enact.<sup>105</sup> It is therefore important to reflect on what the interview contributes to the research process.

Significantly, interviews *tell* rather than *show* and this can often lead academics used to textual approaches to knowledge to privilege the spoken word over the visual. In visual anthropology for example both Henley and Piault have observed that anthropologists who have received little formal training in film-making often place the interview front and centre in their first efforts, privileging the spoken word over the visual and making their films little more than a slideshow.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, whilst the interview has been an effective research tool in oral history, for historians interested in using film-making as a research tool the interview may be less advantageous, especially as there are other possible film-making approaches available.

When the ability to capture people engaging with each other in their own environments became available in the late 1950s, visual anthropologists and observational film-makers were quick to turn away from interviews and use this new technology to capture a seemingly more authentic view of people's lives.<sup>107</sup> Underpinning this attitude was the perception that people's interview testimony was unreliable; Lucien Taylor suggests that rather than reveal what people *actually* do, an interview often allows a person to reflect on their experiences after the fact,<sup>108</sup> and for

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<sup>104</sup> Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past', p. 30.

<sup>105</sup> Henley, 'Are you happy?', p. 52.

<sup>106</sup> See: Piault, 'The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project', p. 358;

Henley, 'Are you happy?', p. 51.

<sup>107</sup> Henley, 'Are you happy?', pp. 51 - 53.

<sup>108</sup> Lucien Taylor, 'Introduction', in David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 4-5.

MacDougal the interview can often be an ‘uneven mixture of candour and self-justification’.<sup>109</sup>

Interviews are however, a more complex process than a focus upon accuracy allows for and I believe that they can generate insights into protagonists that can complement rather than detract from an observational approach. Oral history supports this view. Confronted in the 1970s and 1980s by concerns about the perceived problems of using testimony for research within history, oral historians like Portelli, Thompson and Summerfield reframed the discussion. They suggested that instead of using oral history to uncover factual information, interview testimony could reveal the influence of culture and society on the processes involved in constructing memory. By conducting interviews in a friendly and informal manner, the interviewer is capable of creating, in the words of Portelli, a ‘thick dialogue’ or ‘deep exchange’ that encourages the participants to produce more than just factual statements.<sup>110</sup>

As my relationship with the group developed, the quality of our conversations improved and the discussions became a ‘thick dialogue’ between the re-enactors and myself. Their interview testimony went beyond factual insights that explained their actions and instead offered additional insights into the meanings and emotions behind their activities. These exchanges take place throughout the film and provide additional layers of meaning to the observable behaviours and interactions of the group. Rather than regarding interview testimony as self-serving for the protagonists they help to offer additional insights into the emotion and meaning that they find in the past and that my film is interested in exploring.

The final scene in the film illustrates this point. The interview takes place at Eden Camp, a former Prisoner of War camp that is now a museum with a number of wartime dioramas such as a street during an air raid.<sup>111</sup> Having looked at the household objects on display in a hut that houses a row of shops from the 1940s, Sandra stops to talk about why she re-enacts. She re-enacts to ‘keep their [civilians] memory going’.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> David MacDougal, ‘The subjective voice in ethnographic film’, in Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (eds.), *Fields of Vision: essays in film studies, visual anthropology, and photography*, (London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 245. pp. 217-255.

<sup>110</sup> Alessandro Portelli, ‘Oral history as genre’, in M. Chamberlain & P. R. Thompson (Eds.), *Narrative and Genre* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 30.

<sup>111</sup> For further information about Eden Camp see: <http://www.edencamp.co.uk>

<sup>112</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 47.43 - 48.12.

Her reason for re-enacting is simple and her answer provides the factual information necessary for clearly communicating meaning to a film's audience. Her answer does more than that however when she concludes by saying that:

the only way I can do it, to get the working-class women across, is through re-enacting. But I've always been working class. When Ian [her husband] was in the police I went to the coffee mornings and it was cups and saucers. I've always used mugs, I won't change, sorry Ben!<sup>113</sup>

Sandra's concluding thoughts, with the introduction of her own experiences of class evocatively expressed through her perceived difference between cups or mugs, reveals the subjectivity and personal investment involved in how she chooses to commemorate working-class women during the war. The interview in this instance provides more than factual information and demonstrates the complex relationship between the public and personal that informs Sandra's re-enacting and her understanding of class.

Furthermore, the 'thick dialogue' of interviews is in turn enhanced by the film-making process which captures the more than textual qualities of a conversation. One of the scenes in the film that illustrates this idea is the conversation with Sandra before she looks around Brodsworth Hall when seeing her speak significantly enriches her testimony.<sup>114</sup> The start of her interview - 'I've not been up there yet' - comes in over a shot of the stately home. The film then cuts to Sandra who informs the audience that it, 'should be interesting, shouldn't it?', before looking off camera and raising her eyebrows.<sup>115</sup> In her interview she goes on to provide the factual information that frames the subsequent events for the audience (she is going around a country house and is primarily interested in the servants' quarters), but her feelings towards country houses is communicated with considerable power and nuance, both verbally and non-verbally.

Her expression, tone and choice of words convey considerable information about her sense of history, class, and culture and this is further enhanced by her facial expression and bodily gestures.<sup>116</sup> Film captures these visual clues – looking away, raising her eyebrows, the angry look on her face – and they convey the depth of

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<sup>113</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 48.12 - 48.30.

<sup>114</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 3.01 - 4.04

<sup>115</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 3.01 - 3.06.

<sup>116</sup> Passerini, 'Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), pp. 82-108.

Sandra's emotional response to the idea of visiting a heritage site that she feels is so culturally distant from her own sense of heritage.<sup>117</sup> This conversation allows the audience to read her subsequent gestures and asides as she tours the country house in a more complex and nuanced way.

Rather than undermining observational material, interviews which give protagonists the space for reflection can enable an audience further opportunity to critically engage with the actions and behaviours on screen and reflect on the motivations and ambitions of the film's protagonists. When used together, interviews and film-making techniques from observational cinema offer the historian a way of engaging with individual's emotional and subjective experiences without necessarily losing information by translating the encounter into a different conceptual register.

#### **4. Representing research through film**

During my fieldwork, I gathered approximately 75 hours of material of the group both at different re-enactment events and at their homes. Reviewing and editing my material it became clear that there were a number of areas of academic debate that my research could engage with: people's affective engagement with the past; the role of material culture and the relationship between objects, the past, and people; the use of performance to discuss the past; and what re-enacting can contribute to historical debates around memory, gender, class and the Second World War. With these insights generated through film-making it was important that I chose to represent this knowledge in an appropriate form. However, whereas historians are familiar with how to represent research in academic writing such as monographs and articles, there is far less certainty around how film as a medium can be used to represent historical knowledge.<sup>118</sup> This section therefore turns to the question of how historians can represent insights generated through film-making and communicate them to an academic audience. Using my own practice, I explain the choices that I made about how to represent different aspects of my research in film and prose. This section then turns to the editing strategies that allowed

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<sup>117</sup> Laurajane Smith, 'The "doing" of heritage: heritage as performance', in Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (eds.), *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 69.

<sup>118</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 147; Marnie Hughes-Warrington, 'Introduction: Theory, Production, Reception', in Marnie Hughes-Warrington (ed.), *The History on Film Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.

me to represent my research through film.<sup>119</sup> Using film as a medium for representing the research outcomes of this project allows film-making as a method to become more than just a type of participant observation. Making a research film that sits alongside the written thesis and grapples with the same issues allows this thesis to share research insights generated in this project that resist textual analysis.

#### 4.1 Film and prose as media for representing historical research

Historians that use film-making as a tool for research must consider how best to represent their findings through film and prose. This can be understood as a question of which medium - film or prose - is most appropriate for discussing academic research and representing the past. A chief concern is that film is a poor medium for representing historical knowledge, especially when judged against the standards of prose.<sup>120</sup> Even Ian Kershaw who acknowledges the power of film as a medium and its ability to engage wide audiences' notes that film and television programmes have serious weaknesses from the perspective of the professional historian, particularly with regards to critical analysis and debate.<sup>121</sup>

Rosenstone and Alison Landsberg however contest the view of film as a lesser form of representation than prose. They argue that film conveys knowledge about the past that is necessarily different to what historians can expect to find upon the page.<sup>122</sup> As Rosenstone points out, '[w]ithout denigrating the power of the written word, one can claim for each medium unique powers of representation'.<sup>123</sup> Film can for example let the audience see landscapes, hear sounds, and witness strong emotions in a way that text can

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<sup>119</sup> As this chapter discusses earlier editing is also an opportunity to generate additional research insights through repeated viewing and the juxtaposition of scenes which cast new light onto aspects of the group's re-enacting. Nevertheless this section focuses upon editing as a means of the historian film-maker representing their knowledge about their film's subject.

<sup>120</sup> I.C. Jarvie, 'Seeing Through the Movies', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 8 (1978), p. 378.

<sup>121</sup> Kershaw suggests that 'television also has serious weaknesses from the perspectives of a professional historian. While unquestionably powerful, it is of necessity superficial. Constraints of time alone determine this... there is little room for elaboration, differentiation or qualification'. See: Ian Kershaw, 'The Past on the Box: Strengths and Weaknesses', in David Cannadine (ed.) *History and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 121.

<sup>122</sup> Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, p. 22;

Robert Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibilities of Really Putting History Onto Film', *American Historical Review*, 93, 5 (1988), pp. 1178 - 1179; Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 28 - 29.

<sup>123</sup> Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words', pp. 1178 - 1179.

struggle to match. Underpinning this argument is an acknowledgement about the constructed nature of history. As Landsberg points out, ‘Whether presented in text or on screen, history is the result of putting the past into a narrative’ and film can be a powerful medium for representing the past as long as it is used appropriately.<sup>124</sup>

The relative strengths of film and text in representing certain types of knowledge is supported by visual anthropologists. Unlike historians who have discussed how film-makers have chosen to represent the past in films produced for a general audience, visual anthropologists have considered how film can be used to represent research generated through film-making and that speaks directly to an academic audience. Grimshaw, Ravetz, and Young argue that rather than try to make film conform to the standards of text it is better to acknowledge that film is suited to discussions of certain areas such as the sensory and cultural practices rather than abstract subjects, theories or systems.<sup>125</sup> And in the view of Metje Postma and Peter Crawford, film can present:

images that refer to sensible realities, images that occupy their own place in human experience and within culture, and that communicate to us very differently from words. The image speaks directly to the senses and emphasizes the human body and objectifications of culture like social aesthetics and social interaction, instead of ideas, meaning, and concepts.<sup>126</sup>

Furthermore, both MacDougall and Piauxt stress that film should look to represent and communicate different knowledge to the kinds that are possible to discuss in text.<sup>127</sup> After all, the reason for using film for research is the possibility to show certain actions, events, and behaviour that cannot be depicted by any other means, and, as Piauxt notes, ‘[t]here would be no need of filming if [what has been observed can be expressed another way]’.<sup>128</sup>

For the historian using film-making in their research it is therefore important to identify the insights from the research process that are suited to discuss using film, such

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<sup>124</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 28 - 29.

<sup>125</sup> Young, ‘Observational Cinema’, p. 108; Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema*, p. 131.

<sup>126</sup> Metje Postma and Peter I. Crawford, ‘Introduction: Visual Ethnography and Anthropology,’ in Metje Postma and Peter Ian Crawford (eds), *Reflecting Visual Anthropology: using the camera in anthropological research* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006), p. 2

<sup>127</sup> Piauxt, ‘The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project’, pp. 358 - 362; MacDougall, ‘The visual in anthropology’, pp. 292 - 293.

<sup>128</sup> Piauxt, ‘The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project’, pp. 358 - 362.



as actions and events that are difficult to discuss in text. This selection process is not straightforward however and there will be abstract or theoretically inflected insights produced throughout the research process which are ill-suited to discussion in film. Whilst there is the temptation to fit these research insights into a final film, as Piauxt points out, they can often obscure the focus of the film and its potential meanings, and risk turning a film into a kind of illustrated lecture.<sup>129</sup> This is particularly the case when these insights are in dialogue within an academic body of work that requires considerable contextual knowledge to appreciate and understand. Historian film-makers must therefore make choices about what aspects of the research process are appropriate for the filmic output and be prepared to leave out interesting material for the benefit of the overall film.<sup>130</sup>

The footage that I gathered of Simon re-enacting as a Bevin Boy offers an example of the choices that historians need to make in creating a narratively coherent film. There were a number of instances when I was filming Simon as a Bevin Boy that the public would discuss many other topics associated with the history of mining such as the miners strike in 1984 - 1985 rather than the specific history of the Bevin Boys.<sup>131</sup> As a historian these discussions were enlightening and demonstrated how the reception to a representation of the war can be a fluid and dynamic process.<sup>132</sup> However, these scenes would shift the narrative of the film away from its main focus on the sense of personal satisfaction Simon gets from speaking to the public about his re-enacting. Thus, I chose to include a more appropriate scene of Simon speaking to the public that could support the film's narrative focus.<sup>133</sup>

Historian film-makers need not consign this material to the cutting room floor however. Paul Henley suggests that an accompanying text, essay, or thesis provides a

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<sup>129</sup> Piauxt, 'The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film Project, pp. 358 – 359.

<sup>130</sup> Henley, 'Putting film to work', pp. 122 – 124.

<sup>131</sup> Research Clip, *Simon Kerstin at Colwyn Bay, 2015*, <https://filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/>

<sup>132</sup> For a discussion of this point see Chapter Three. With regards the different reception of representations of memory see: Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3; Rebecca Bramall, 'Memory, meaning and multidirectionality: "Remembering" austerity Britain', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, pp. 202 – 203.

<sup>133</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 14.56 - 17.30.

useful space for addressing issues that are ill suited to film, as well as a means of situating the film and the films findings within an academic context that further enhances how the film speaks directly to a critical context.<sup>134</sup> For my research, I chose to follow this approach and produce a 50-minute film and a 50,000-word thesis. In addition to the final film, I was also able to produce research clips of scenes from events that discuss aspects of re-enacting such as how re-enactors engage with audiences or why a re-enactor displays their objects in a certain way. This material would complicate and confuse the main film but is still of interest to an academic audience. By hosting these scenes on a website about the research project, research clips are a way of making more of the research available to an interested audience as well as providing supporting evidence for the thesis.<sup>135</sup>

With the respective representational strengths of the two media, I was able to use film to discuss the emotional, sensory, and embodied nature of re-enacting and use the thesis to discuss the more abstract ideas that were better suited to discussions in prose, such as the range of responses to Simon's Bevin Boy mentioned previously as well as reflect on my own practice in relation to historical research methods.<sup>136</sup> Indeed the following two chapters in this thesis use the research film, research clips, and interviews as evidence for how and why different members of the group re-enact and what that can reveal about the cultural memory of the Second World War. These two principle areas of research emerged from the fieldwork and were appropriate to discuss using text. For example, during the early stages of editing it became apparent that the spaces where the group re-enact inform their re-enactment strategies. Notably these spaces influence how they display their collections and their interactions with members of the public. In the final film, an audience attuned to this field of research can see evidence of this aspect of re-enacting in different scenes. However, rather than a detailed discussion about this aspect of their re-enacting in the film, the group's strategies for displaying material culture as well as their performance practices was better suited to the written part of this

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<sup>134</sup> Henley, 'Putting film to work', p. 124.

<sup>135</sup> The website is [www.filmingthepast.com](http://www.filmingthepast.com)

<sup>136</sup> For the research clip of Simon discussing the Bevin Boy with the public see, *Simon Kerstin at Colwyn Bay, 2015*, <https://filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/> See also: Piauxt, 'The Construction and Specificity of an Ethnographic Film project', pp. 360-361.

thesis where it was possible to situate their practice within the critical context of museology, performance studies and public history.

#### 4.2 Editing Film to Represent Research

The written element of my thesis was able to follow established conventions within history for writing up research, using both secondary literature and the material generated during my fieldwork with *UK Homefront* as evidence to support my work.<sup>137</sup>

There are however few, if any, established conventions within academic history for using film as a medium for communicating research outcomes to an academic audience. Both Landsberg and Rosenstone have looked at how commercially produced films discuss the past on screen and offer insights into how historians could potentially represent their own work in this medium. Landsberg argues that:

[F]or history on film to be considered history, for it to be recognizable as history by academic historians, it needs at the very least to complicate the kind of simple identification that tends to be encouraged by filmic technologies and the stylistic and narrative conventions of classical Hollywood cinema.<sup>138</sup>

Rosenstone similarly suggests that rather than mainstream historical films or documentaries it is experimental or innovative historical films that employ a variety of theories, ideologies, and aesthetic approaches which have the potential to impact upon historical thought.<sup>139</sup>

Examples of these innovative films are *Far From Poland* (Jill Godmilow, 1984) *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), *Walker* (Alex Cox, 1987), and *La Commune* (Peter Watkins, 2000). All of them were ‘[m]ade in conscious opposition to Hollywood codes, conventions, and practices’, and use formal strategies like directly addressing the audience, creative anachronisms, and re-enactment in order to ‘contest the seamless stories of heroes and victims that make up the mainstream feature (and, one might add, the standard documentary)’.<sup>140</sup> For example, through a use of voiceover and on-screen discussions between re-enactors about their role in the film, both Godmilow and

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<sup>137</sup> For a discussion of how historians write about the past see: Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp. 145 - 173.

<sup>138</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 29.

<sup>139</sup> Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, pp. 15 - 19.

<sup>140</sup> Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, p. 50.

Watkins make the audience aware that what they are watching are re-enactments of events rather than a window onto the past.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, throughout *Walker* Cox uses the presence of anachronistic technology like computers and helicopters to draw parallels between William Walker's activities in Nicaragua in the 1850s and those of the US government in the 1980s.<sup>142</sup> These formal techniques encourage the audience to engage critically with these films as works of history rather than as immersive entertainment. I believe that formal strategies that encourage self-conscious reflection in the audience offer the historian a way of editing the filmic element of their research that can be appropriate for an academic research film.

Alongside an appreciation of the formal strategies used by film-makers to engage with historical ideas on screen, visual anthropology again offers historians guidance on how they can represent the knowledge gained through the use of film-making as a tool for research. Significantly, visual anthropologists have looked to resolve the tension between using observational film-making as a research method and representing that research through the medium of film. As such the insights by visual anthropologists are perhaps the most directly useful to historians who have used observational film-making as an integral part of their research.

Like the innovative historical films discussed by Rosenstone and Landsberg, observational films made by visual anthropologists for an academic audience use editing techniques that support their aim of film-making as research tool. Henley argues that overzealous editorial intervention through techniques such as excessive explanatory commentary can undermine observational film-making's ability to transmit a sense of the experience of the event represented.<sup>143</sup> Both Young and Henley argue that it is better to create a film that keeps intact the 'congruency between the subject as experienced by the film-makers and the film as experienced by the audience'.<sup>144</sup> So rather than using conventional editing techniques drawn from commercial film and television, such as rapid cuts or overly didactic voice-overs, film-makers make editing choices that support

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<sup>141</sup> See *Far From Poland* (Jill Godmilow, 1984); *La Commune* (Peter Watkins, 2000).

<sup>142</sup> *Walker* (Alex Cox, 1987).

<sup>143</sup> Henley, 'Putting film to work', p. 120.

<sup>144</sup> Colin Young quoted in Henley 'Putting Film to Work', p. 120.

their observational approach and reflect a desire to respect the integrity of the participants and the events filmed.<sup>145</sup>

Underpinning this approach to film as research is the belief that cinema is ‘a medium of suggestion and implication rather than of statement and description and the overall aim should be not to tell but to show’.<sup>146</sup> The film as an output of a research project should remain not just an act of discovery for the maker but also for the viewer who is encouraged to construct actively the meaning of the film. As Henley acknowledges in regards to visual anthropology, this approach is a serious challenge to the conventional strategies of representation in textual anthropology where many visual anthropologists would see their role as providing a ‘hermetic interpretative context for the material they are presenting’.<sup>147</sup> The same problem applies to history where the role of the historian is to present their interpretations of the past and, using evidence and analysis, persuade the audience of both its validity and comprehensiveness. This is not to suggest that there should be no attempt to provide any interpretative context for the film especially as a lack of any context can make a film almost impenetrable. Instead, for both visual anthropologists and historians using film-making as a research tool it is a question of finding appropriate editorial strategies that provide a relevant interpretive context for the worlds they represent without overwhelming the ‘experience-rich’ nature of observational film-making.<sup>148</sup>

In my own work I therefore looked to use editorial strategies that would allow my film to communicate my key findings about the group as well as give the audience the space to construct their own meanings about the group. These strategies can, I believe, be understood as choices and I took three main choices in my edit: the choice of narrative structure and the focus in the film on two re-enactors, Sandra and Simon; the decision to edit a number of scenes in the film in accordance to observational film-making methods suggested by visual anthropologists; and the choice to break with observational film-making methods where appropriate in order to make a research film suitable for history as a discipline.

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<sup>145</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 119.

<sup>146</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 119.

<sup>147</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 119.

<sup>148</sup> Henley, ‘Putting film to work’, p. 120.

Throughout my period of filming the group, it was while reviewing rushes and roughly cutting sequences that it became clear that the narrative structure of the film was an issue.<sup>149</sup> Narrative structure contributes to how audiences engage and ascribes meanings to the events of the film. Its construction entails significant authorial intervention and at the minimum, it requires both the truncation of chronology as well as some active alteration of chronology in order to impose some meaning or preferred reading on the film. In addition, while I wanted there to be enough space in the film for the audience to be able to reach their own conclusions about its subject matter, it was also important that the audience could be able to construct a preferred narrative in the film, one that corresponds to some degree with the narrative of the filmmaker.<sup>150</sup>

Both Sandra and Simon offered an expressiveness and eloquence about their relationships with re-enacting, the home front and the meanings that they derived from the past. Thus, I decided to create a film with Sandra and Simon as the focus, to use them and their experiences during events to create a narrative that would illuminate key aspects of re-enacting such as processes, and the sensory and emotional engagement of re-enactors with History. This shifted my focus during filming from the group as a whole to Sandra and Simon, concentrating on capturing the moments of their re-enacting that would illuminate their relationship to re-enacting, the Second World War and History. This new focus was important not only for creating a narrative for the film but it also enables the film to speak to a wider critical context within public history, re-enacting and the cultural memory of the war.

The film follows ethnographic conventions by using a story-like structure, based on ‘a sequence of episodes linked in time or in space that eventually result in a conclusion’.<sup>151</sup> Both Sandra and Simon are introduced at the beginning of the film; the audience are shown through different episodes at home and at events, how and why they re-enact. The importance of class to Sandra is emphasised in the scene at Brodsworth

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<sup>149</sup> Narrative in film is a term that encompasses a number of areas. It can include matters such as a film’s structure, the position from which a story is narrated, how characters are developed or deployed, how the world in which the action takes place is evoked by the adoption of particular cinematographic strategies and styles, as well as more substantive matters, such as the use of particular tropes or story-lines. See: Paul Henley, ‘Narratives: the Guilty Secret of Ethnographic Film-Making?’, in Postma and Ian Crawford (eds.), *Reflecting Visual Ethnography: Using the camera in anthropological*, pp. 377 - 378.

<sup>150</sup> Henley, ‘Narratives: the Guilty Secret of Ethnographic Film-Making?’, p. 377.

<sup>151</sup> Henley, ‘Narratives: the Guilty Secret of Ethnographic Film-Making?’, p. 384.

Hall, whilst Simon's personal and emotional engagement with the past is shown through his discussion of his grandfather's badges and the scene of him as a Bevin Boy. This beginning helps to frame the later episodes involving Sandra and Simon in terms of class, gender and heritage and the sensory and emotional aspects of re-enacting.

The montage of the group re-enacting sixteen minutes into the film signals a shift in the narrative and the film then focuses on Sandra and Simon at two separate events where the audience see them respectively re-enact washing during the war and road building. This narrative development is an attempt to use the two different experiences of the two re-enactors to create a plot, loose though it is, that can engage and educate an audience about the research at the heart of the film. In this respect my approach to narrative structure follows Young's advice that the 'details of... films must be a substitute for dramatic tension, and the film's authenticity must be a substitute for artificial excitement... first and foremost they will have meaning within their own context'.<sup>152</sup>

In editing scenes of Simon and Sandra re-enacting I attempted to follow the observational film-making conventions suggested by visual anthropologists. In my film I minimised wherever possible the use of quick cutting typically used in television and film and instead made every effort to retain the long shots from the film-making in order to capture the rhythms and spatial configurations of the re-enactment events and my own interactions with Sandra and Simon. In these scenes I also retained the ambiguities, vacillations and repetitions that are an integral aspect of everyday life but which could be excised by a conventional editor concerned with eliminating repetition. For example, I could have reduced the scene of Simon showing me his respirator to a simple exchange about what he thought the respirator meant. Instead, I chose to edit the scene so that it retained the sense of the exchange between Simon and myself, his difficulty and self-consciousness talking about what the respirator meant to him, and the role of the sensory and the visual in his relationship with material culture. Furthermore, scenes such as this one were included in the film because although they are problematic in terms of advancing the film's narrative, they spoke to the research questions at the heart of this project, both in terms of insights into re-enacting *and* film-making as a useful method for historians.

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<sup>152</sup> Young, 'Observational Cinema', p. 108.

I also chose to use a voice-over at the beginning of the film and was important for framing the film as part of my research project. It was self-reflexive, alerting the audience that the film is a representation of my research rather than an unmediated window into the lives of Sandra and Simon.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, the voice-over allowed me to suggest a preferred reading of the film to the audience. This decision was informed by conventions within visual anthropology where film-makers often claim authorship in a title card that comes up immediately after the main title.<sup>154</sup> However I restricted the use of voice-over to the beginning of the film as a way of allowing the audience the space to be able to respond to the film's participants and, as Henley suggests, engage in a process of discovery and construction of meaning themselves.<sup>155</sup>

It is also important to stress that I used a mix of editing strategies, some of which contravene the strategies used in observational films by visual anthropologists. Most significantly, I chose to include interviews, especially the formal interviews between Sandra, Simon and myself at their homes, a decision which largely contradicts the observational approach to editing. These interviews however were my strategy for suggesting preferred meanings in the film, particularly in the scenes that followed on from them. For example at the beginning of the film, interviews allow me to introduce both Sandra and Simon to the audience clearly and concisely. More importantly, these introductory interviews allow me to broadly frame their re-enacting for the audience; in terms of class and heritage for Sandra and personal and emotional meanings for Simon. We learn about how Sandra started re-enacting and her desire to present a working-class housewife before we then see her visit a stately home and do her talk in its grounds. Similarly Simon explains why he re-enacts and reveals his desire to teach people about the past before we see him speaking to the public at an event and the satisfaction that he gets from this.<sup>156</sup>

Additionally I chose to use non-diegetic music in the film. Ideally, this music would have been the music that the group play at the events. However, the music is

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<sup>153</sup> Jay Ruby, 'The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film', in Alan Rosenthal and John Corner (eds.) *New Challenges for Documentary: second edition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 34- 37.

<sup>154</sup> Henley, 'Observational cinema as practical ethnography', pp. 114 - 115.

<sup>155</sup> Henley, 'Observational cinema as practical ethnography', p. 119.

<sup>156</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 3.01 - 4.04, 14.56 - 17.30.



copyrighted, and so I chose music that was similar and available to use. I used the music to help with transitions between scenes and to provide the film with a sense of movement and energy. My choice of music was influenced by the lack of urgency in the film's structure and aims to make the film more engaging for an audience.

This mixture of representational strategies was I believe successful in creating a research film about *UK Homefront*. Furthermore, this mixture allowed the audience to understand the film as the outcome of a research project, whilst also giving them the space to make their own discoveries about how and why people re-enact and find meaning in the history of the Second World War.

### **Conclusion**

Not every historian is going to find film-making to be a useful tool for research, governed as it is by issues of appropriateness as well as considerable technical and practical factors. What this chapter has demonstrated however is that by building on work in visual anthropology, film-making offers historians a valuable research tool that can be used in areas like public history and cultural memory where narratives of the past are visibly and publicly constructed and individuals engage with history through sensory knowledge, as well as cognitively. Furthermore, by unpacking the processes involved in my own practice this chapter also offers more general insights into the film-making process that other historians can use in their own work.

This chapter also addresses how the research insights generated by film-making can be disseminated to an academic audience. I argue that historians can use film and prose as mediums that can effectively communicate the different strands of a research project that uses film-making as a tool of research. In my own practice, *Re-enacting the Second World War: History, Memory and the UK Homefront* focuses on the experiences of Sandra and Simon as a means of addressing the subjective nature of re-enactment and unpacks their relationship with the homefront and History in a way that respects the non-discursive aspects of their practice. In turn, the written element of this thesis reflects on my own film-making practice and brings the aspects of the group's re-enacting into a critical dialogue with the scholarship on re-enacting, public history, performance, and cultural memory. Thus, the following two chapters draw on this body of work to analyse

how and why the group re-enact the home front and consider how their representations can illuminate the contemporary cultural memory of the Second World War in Britain.

## Chapter Two

### **Modes of Engagement: Performing the Past in the *UK Homefront***

This chapter uses *UK Homefront* to examine hobby re-enacting as a pedagogical practice. It explores why members of *UK Homefront* re-enact and considers how these reasons shape the way that they re-enact the British homefront during the Second World War. This chapter asks three key questions about *UK Homefront*'s practice: firstly, what motivates members of *UK Homefront* to re-enact the British Homefront during the Second World War? Secondly, how do their motivations inform their interactions with members of the public? And finally, how do members of the group perform the homefront, both for themselves and for their audiences?

The scholarship on re-enactment focuses on the educational ambitions of the participants as well as the personal historical experiences it affords individual re-enactors. Jerome de Groot emphasises what he sees as the 'dual nature of re-enactment – a public, educational element which desires simply to teach, and a private aspect which is less interested in historiographical issues and more with a deeply personalised historicised experience'.<sup>1</sup> Underpinning this dual nature however is a perceived distinction between the aims and goals of amateur and professional re-enactors, with the former interested in historical experience and the latter concerned with education.

A divide between amateur and professional is a feature of the scholarship that has discussed the educational aspect to re-enactment. Essays within *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* (2010), for example look at live performance within museum and heritage sites, but focus exclusively on work done by paid living history interpreters or academic practitioners.<sup>2</sup> The presence of the hobbyist re-enactor at heritage sites is largely missing from these accounts. Similarly, in his work on living history museums in North America, Scott Magelssen focuses exclusively upon the performance practices of

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (eds.), *Performing Heritage: Research, practice, and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Leigh Clemons, 'Present Enacting the Past', in Scott Magelssen and Rhona Justice-Malloy, *Enacting History* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2011), p. 12.

professional living history performers while suggesting that hobby re-enactors are less likely to be seen as historians by an audience.<sup>3</sup> Within this scholarship, it is the living history practitioners whose performance practices are thought to offer greater innovation and interest than the performance practices of amateur re-enactors, commonly viewed as grounded in nineteenth century modes of naturalism designed to further personal engagement with history and a sense of immersion, rather than inform an audience.<sup>4</sup>

In turn the research on hobby re-enactors has concentrated upon the personal historicised experience that amateurs obtain through re-enacting and this is often cast as the defining motivation for amateur re-enacting.<sup>5</sup> For example, in her work on re-enactment in film and television, Alison Landsberg argues that ‘although some historical reenactments do attract audiences, the experience is primarily for the reenactors, who are after an immersive, living-in-the-past, experience’.<sup>6</sup> Megan O’Brien Backhouse echoes this sentiment and suggests that ‘while re-enactment has a nominal and superficial purpose of providing entertainment and education for the public, it is more for the re-enactors themselves’.<sup>7</sup> Drawing upon her work on English Civil War re-enactors she argues that the re-enactor is most interested in ‘the *experience* of history - going beyond the books and lessons to discover what it would have been like had they lived “back” then’.<sup>8</sup> Research into the relationship between hobby re-enactors and their audiences, particularly with regards the sharing of knowledge and education, has been largely overlooked.

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<sup>3</sup> Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History Through Performance* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, p. 103; Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering, ‘From Realism to the Affective Turn: An Agenda’, in Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering (eds.), *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1 – 5; Iain McCalman, ‘Loutherbourg’s Simulations: Reenactment and Realism in Late-Georgian Britain’, in McCalman and Pickering (eds.), *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective*, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> Vanessa Agnew, ‘History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present’, *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 11:3 (2007), pp. 299-312; Stephen Gapps, ‘Mobile monuments: A view of historical reenactment and authenticity from inside the costume cupboard of history’, *Rethinking History*, 13:3, (2009), pp. 395 – 409.

<sup>6</sup> For quotations with a different spelling of re-enacting, the spelling is kept the same as in the source. Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 112 – 113.

<sup>7</sup> Megan O’Brien Backhouse, ‘Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses: History and Identity’, in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (eds.) *Public History and Heritage Today: People and their Pasts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> O’Brien Backhouse, ‘Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses’, p. 113.

My study of the *UK Homefront* – including the film that focuses upon two members of the group - certainly supports the view that re-enactors pursue ‘affective engagement’ by ‘feeling’ the past through objects, costumes, and impersonating the everyday life of civilians in the Second World War. However, this chapter also sets out to demonstrate the complexity and richness of hobby re-enacting and contest the scepticism towards the non-professional re-enactor among scholars, and in the museum and heritage industry. Re-enactors are often realistic about the limits of re-enactment, wary of claiming access to some absolute truth through impersonation, and thus more aware of ‘ambivalence, simultaneous temporal registers, anachronism, and the everywhere of error’ than most scholars have recognised.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, the chapter aims to show that an equally important motivation for *UK Homefront* is to use the past to educate the public about the history of the home front and ordinary working-class people’s contribution to the war effort, an approach which many believe passionately has been overlooked or ignored by military history’s focus on key battles and the Blitz. Instead of pursuing an immersive experience of the home front, re-enactors in the group create exhibition spaces, talk to audiences about history, and share their knowledge about objects in order to pursue a wider agenda that brings together the personal, the historical, the museological and the experiential. The *UK Homefront* group maintains a strong collective desire to educate the public about the Second World War, which shapes their practices and their relationship to their audiences.

Additionally, this chapter also demonstrates how documentary film-making can play a central role in research projects within academic history. Footage generated through film-making has worked as a form of visual note taking and much of the analysis in this chapter is informed by the repeated viewing of this footage in the editing of *Re-enacting the Second World War: History, Memory and the UK Homefront* (Ben Knowles, 2016).<sup>10</sup> As a research tool it has been particularly useful at revealing and recording through sound and vision the discussions between re-enactors and their audience at a conversational level (unlike oral testimony or questionnaires) and captures

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<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Henley, ‘Putting film to work: Observational cinema as practical ethnography’, in Sarah Pink, Laszlo Kurti and Ana Isabel Afonso (eds.), *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 118.

the intentions and expectations of individual re-enactors.<sup>11</sup> Thus, this chapter is an appropriate opportunity to use this footage to analyse how the group *makes* History through re-enacting and bring their practice into a productive dialogue with scholarship on re-enactment, museum studies and performance studies.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter explores how *UK Homefront* produces historical knowledge in three sections. The first section examines why members of *UK Homefront* re-enact and argues that as well as an interest in experiencing the homefront, re-enactors are motivated by a desire to educate people about the history of the homefront. Furthermore, it is important for academics to take account of this desire to educate people because it plays such a central role in informing how re-enactors re-enact. Wanting to teach people about the homefront and actually doing it are two different things however and the second section will examine how *UK Homefront* organise their re-enacting so that the dissemination of knowledge can take place. Specifically, this section interprets the group's uses of site, authenticity, and space as a way of framing their encounter with the public as recognisably 'educational'. The final section will look at the performance strategies used by members of the group and will suggest some of the ways that these strategies can produce historical insights into the homefront. Though the accompanying film focuses on two individuals, Sandra Day (housewife; washer-woman) and Simon Kerstin (Bevin Boy; ARP Warden; road worker), this chapter also includes my wider research with the group and uses interviews, observational footage, and research clips produced during my fieldwork to answer these three questions.<sup>13</sup>

### **1. The Motivations of *UK Homefront* Re-enactors**

Retired science teacher Mark Best is a member of *UK Homefront* and has been re-enacting as a 1940s science teacher for twelve years. In August 2015 I interviewed Mark at a re-enactment event in Lytham-St-Annes, a seaside town in the North West of

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<sup>11</sup> Film-making as a method for historians is discussed in Chapter One. For discussions about film as a tool for academic research see: Henley, 'Putting film to work: Observational cinema as practical ethnography', pp. 109 - 130; Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media, and Representation in Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 77 - 92.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Waterton, 'People and their pasts: public history today', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17:2, (2011), pp. 195-196.

<sup>13</sup> Research clips and interviews produced during this research can be seen at <https://filmingthepast.com>

England. It was a ‘show-and-tell’ event for the group and over the course of the weekend members spoke to around four hundred people about the items that the group had out on display. Mark had brought a gramophone and selection of records with him and he played them throughout the day, often stopping to speak to families about how the gramophone worked and the types of music that were listened to during the war. When I asked him what motivates him to re-enact he replied that he re-enacts to:

get into the atmosphere and get an understanding of what people's lives were like in the Second World War. It's okay listening to a lecture, someone telling you a set of facts and figures, but it's another thing to actually get involved in it, meet other people with a similar interest and learn about it... As well as educating the public, which is the purpose of today's event!<sup>14</sup>

Mark's response serves to illustrate why members of *UK Homefront* re-enact: because it is an enjoyable, sociable, and lively activity, during which re-enactors attempt not only to experience the past first hand, but also to teach people about the homefront. This section unpacks these last two motivations in some detail and examines what getting into ‘the atmosphere’ of the homefront and educating the public means to the members of *UK Homefront*. This section challenges the idea that hobby re-enactors prioritise experiencing the past over teaching their audience and instead argues that it is important to recognise the significance of both attitudes in shaping a re-enactors practice. These two motivations are key to understanding how the group re-enact the homefront and will inform my reading of the group's practice in the subsequent two sections that focus upon how *UK Homefront* teaches people about the war.

Academic work that has considered what motivates hobby re-enactors to re-enact has focused upon their desire for an intimate, bodily experience of a certain time period and during my fieldwork members of *UK Homefront* certainly expressed a similar view.<sup>15</sup> In an interview with Michelle Bridges she suggested that it was the ‘feel’ she got from re-enacting that really encouraged her to keep doing the hobby; for Mark Best re-enacting allowed him to ‘get into the atmosphere’ of the 1940s. The appeal of the bodily sensation generated through re-enacting is similarly echoed by Simon Kerstin who, attending an event at Colwyn Bay in North Wales where the group transformed an

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Best, Interview, August 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Gapps, ‘Mobile monuments’, pp. 395 – 409; O'Brien Backhouse, ‘Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses’, p. 113; Agnew, ‘History's Affective Turn’, p. 301.

empty shop front on the high street into a space for the group's re-enacting, described the sensation he felt going into the shop as like 'stepping back in time'.<sup>16</sup> Sandra Day feels this embodied history even more keenly: when asked about how she re-enacts, she replied, 'I live it... I live the forties' and this aspect of her re-enacting is practically rendered visible in the research film.<sup>17</sup>

Seemingly banal objects from the everyday life of wartime Britain become touchstones for re-enactors who take from the object a sensual understanding of the homefront. In the film that accompanies this thesis, for example, Simon Kerstin talks about a recently acquired 1940s breathing apparatus and how it conveys to him a certain sense of history. The sensory nature of this feeling is captured through the observational filming of him handling the respirator. He suggests that, 'I wouldn't call it a ghostly presence but you can feel yourself back there, when it was in use...it's got history behind it, you can feel yourself in the moment when it's getting strapped on'. The breathing apparatus is a conduit into the experiences of the homefront for Simon who can use touch to imagine and feel, more vividly, the person that wore it. A modern reproduction in comparison 'feels inert somehow', tangibly different to the original which 'looks old, it feels like it has a history connected to it... it's got a connection to people from the past'.<sup>18</sup> For Simon the breathing apparatus is like a key that can help him to access the bodily sensations of someone alive during the war and allows him to take an imaginative step back into the life of an Air Raid Warden or Bevin Boy. Or as Mads Daugbjerg notes with regards US Civil War re-enactors, there is a desire for a tactile relationship amongst re-enactors, to '*touch* the past and in turn, to be touched'.<sup>19</sup> Simon is not unique amongst the group in this regard and all of the re-enactors in the group found a similar attraction to objects from the war that, literally through the act of touching, helped them to feel a closer connection to the homefront.

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<sup>16</sup> See research clip *Colwyn Bay April 2015*, <https://filmingthepast.com/colwyn-bay-april-2015/>

<sup>17</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, May 2015.

<sup>18</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War: History, Memory and the UK Homefront* (Ben Knowles, 2016), 22.44 - 26.03

<sup>19</sup> Mads Daugbjerg, 'Patchworking the past: materiality, touch and the assembling of "experience" in American Civil War re-enactment', in Mads Daugbjerg, Rivka Syd Eisner and Britta Timm Knudsen (eds.), *Re-enacting the Past: Heritage, materiality and performance* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 46.



The importance placed on the ‘feel’ of the past, the sense of ‘atmosphere’ when re-enacting or even the idea of ‘stepping back in time’ at an event echoes the findings of Rebecca Schneider who spoke to US Civil War re-enactors about the importance of feel to their practice. She found that many re-enactors ‘fought simply for the *feel* of fighting, the *feel* of encampment... The *feel* - the affective engagement - is key’.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Alison Landsberg’s recent work on television, film and virtual exhibits suggests that these are texts that foster an affective engagement with the past and she argues that there is a widespread desire within contemporary culture to have a personal, felt connection to the past that she calls the experiential mode of engagement. Landsberg suggests that the ‘experiential mode is tactile and material in the bodily sense’ and that the experiential is ‘first and foremost an affective mode: when engaged this way, one’s body is touched, moved, provoked’.<sup>21</sup> Re-enacting is an experiential mode of engagement that provides participants with the feel of the past, both literally through touching material culture and artefacts but also through the atmosphere of the past, with the former often evoking the latter. For members of the group, re-enacting offers an opportunity to engage affectively with the homefront, to *feel* everyday life as a housewife, or a Bevin Boy, or an ARP warden, and this is an extremely powerful and compelling sensation for the members of *UK Homefront* and an important reason for why they choose to re-enact. For individuals within the group, the homefront is ‘reanimated through physical and psychological experience’,<sup>22</sup> and re-enacting allows the members to affectively engage with the aspects of the 1940s that intrigue them the most.

As well as being able to get the feel of everyday life on the homefront, a key aspect of affective engagement is feeling a close, personal connection with the past, which is typically more significant than the connections made in other forms of history.<sup>23</sup> In an interview about what motivates him to re-enact, Steve Johnson believes that ‘it’s important that history is explained in a human way rather than just books’ and for him re-enacting is a compelling way of engaging with the Second World War because it allows both re-enactors and audiences to ‘get a personal view of view what

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<sup>20</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>22</sup> Vanessa Agnew, ‘Introduction: What is Reenactment?’, *Criticism*, 46, 3 (Summer 2004), p. 330.

<sup>23</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, pp. 105 - 106.

the war was like for people's lives'.<sup>24</sup> This idea reflects the findings of Rosenzweig and Thelan who argue in their work on public history and affective engagement that most Americans shared the sense that 'the familial and intimate past, along with intimate uses of other pasts, mattered most' and that '[r]espondents felt most unconnected to the past when they encountered it in books, movies, or classrooms. They felt most connected when they encountered the past with the people who mattered the most to them, and they often pursued the past with family and friends'.<sup>25</sup> Like these respondents, members of *UK Homefront* are extremely motivated by the close personal connections that they can make through re-enacting and the hobby provides a relationship with history that they feel they are unable to get from different forms like books or television.

The importance of people finding a personal connection to the past can be seen in the case of *UK Homefront*, where many members of the group make the connection to the homefront through their family history. As discussed in the film, Simon Kerstin's grandfather was a train driver and an ARP warden during the war and, inspired by the ARP badge and whistle that he found after his grandfather passed away, Simon started to re-enact as an ARP warden. Simon never spoke to his grandfather about his experiences of the war and this lack of knowledge about his family history has proved to be a source of both regret and inspiration for him as a re-enactor. He states that:

we [his family] never really talked that much about it... I wish I talked to him about it more, that's the biggest mistake, uh, I don't know if it's a mistake a crime or what but people just don't engage enough about their own family's history and past. I like to make sure that people remember'.<sup>26</sup>

Re-enacting the same wartime occupation as his grandfather is a way for Simon to connect with his own family's history as well as providing him with a motivation and purpose for his re-enacting.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Steve Johnson, Interview, August 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, 'The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life', in Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds.), *The Public History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 13.25 - 13.55.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of family history and the role of generational memory see Penny Summerfield, 'The generation of memory: Gender and the popular memory of the Second World War in Britain', in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 25 - 46.

Simon's decision to re-enact as a Bevin Boy was also influenced by his family history, albeit a less literal influence than his decision to re-enact as an ARP warden. During the war, a railway worker was a reserved occupation, and this is an aspect of the war that Simon feels is marginalised in the contemporary public history of the war.<sup>28</sup> This inspired him to re-enact an aspect of the war that he believes is similarly marginalised - the Bevin Boy, the conscripted labour force that worked on the mines during the war. He suggests '[my grandfather is] probably why I do the Bevin Boy... the Bevin Boy came about because the story wasn't getting told'. Portraying a Bevin Boy is a way for Simon to pay tribute to the 'bravery and sacrifice' of those, like his grandfather, who were in reserved occupations.<sup>29</sup>

Sandra Day is another re-enactor in the group that uses her family history to make personal connections with the homefront during the war. Like some of the other women in the group, she initially went to re-enactment events because of her husband Ian's enthusiasm for the hobby. Prior to re-enacting she had very little interest in history and it was only once she became more active as a re-enactor that she became really interested in the history of the Second World War. She first started to re-enact as a member of the Women's Voluntary Service but when that outfit was unavailable for an event she decided instead to go as a housewife. From that point on she focused all her attention upon portraying an explicitly working-class housewife. She now attends events as a working-class housewife, displays the household items that she inherited from her grandmother, and demonstrates to the public how washing was done during the war. Unlike her previous experiences of history such as at school and on television, re-enacting allowed Sandra access to a past that was personally meaningful to her through her experience of family and childhood.<sup>30</sup>

The convention within re-enacting of portraying an occupation also allows Sandra to use her own interests to find meaning in the homefront. As shown in the

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<sup>28</sup> As Summerfield and Penniston-Bird argue, men in reserved occupations often felt marginalised by popular discourses about the war and struggled to compose satisfying accounts of their experiences. See: Summerfield, Penny and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 13.55 - 14.17.

<sup>30</sup> Sandra's personal relationship to the war is discussed in terms of cultural memory in Chapter Three. Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

research film, at events Sandra gives a talk about washing during the war and uses household objects inherited from her grandmother to demonstrate how women did their washing.<sup>31</sup> Sandra's interest in washing during the war was, she suggests, due to:

how I've been bought up. Going to the washhouse since I was seven, being shown how to do a wash. Two double sheets of washing, dragging them up the hill every night to the wash house, that was me every night of the week... If it wasn't my mother's it was my aunt's, if it wasn't my aunt's it would be grandma, if it wasn't the grandma it would be the neighbours. And I loved every minute of it.<sup>32</sup>

Sandra's childhood experience allows her to make a connection to washing during the war that she finds both compelling and meaningful. Simon Kerstin's portrayal of the Bevin Boy was similarly influenced by his upbringing but in a less immediate manner. Unlike Sandra who draws upon her own experiences of washing as a child in Liverpool, Simon is inspired by an experience that he was denied growing up in the pit towns and villages in Yorkshire, where he still lives. At events he typically tells his audience that he could have been a miner had the mining industry still been thriving by the time he was old enough to work in them; nevertheless the presence, as well as the absence, of the mining industry in his everyday life has focused one element of his re-enacting upon a very specific aspect of the home front.

Another example of re-enactors making personal connections with the history of the homefront is through their use of contemporary experiences. A good example of this is the tendency of members in the group to portray the wartime equivalent of their current occupation. Amongst the group two members re-enact as policemen and one as a science teacher, jobs that they had until they retired, and Simon re-enacts as a road builder and surveyor, the wartime equivalent to his job as a civil engineer.<sup>33</sup> An interview with one re-enactor, Carol Deane, provides a good illustration of this approach:

I'm a food teacher and I'm interested in wartime and I've been doing this [re-enacting] for about 8 years. I just got more and more interested, started collecting

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<sup>31</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 33.17 - 42.48.

<sup>32</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Both Bill Jackson and Ian Day re-enact as policemen. Ian typically re-enacts as a green grocer but often combines this role with his former job in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the police force by going to events dressed as a green grocer and then pretending to be working 'undercover'.

the packaging and started researching it, some of the stories you read are quite interesting. The badge I've got on is a food leaders badge and they were commissioned by the Ministry of Food, they were usually food teachers or domestic science teachers as they were known back then, they were sent out into communities to advise housewives on what to cook, what to do with the rations and how to make do with what you had really... I found out about it through a book I started reading, then I found a picture of the badge [they wore], finally managed to track one down because they're quite hard to get...they were part of the WVS and usually they were domestic science teachers so as a domestic science teacher I thought, well! It sort of made sense!<sup>34</sup>

For Carol, her experience of teaching people about food, nutrition and cooking helps her to access embodied knowledge about the life of a wartime food leader.

In his landmark text, *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel suggests that re-enactors use the hobby as vehicle for finding personal meaning in the past and describes the hobby as a 'quest for immediacy, the search for a past which is palpably and visibly present'.<sup>35</sup> Personal connections that draw on existing knowledge and experiences allow re-enactors to make an imaginative leap into the experiences of the men and women on the homefront. When thinking about why hobby re-enactors re-enact, it is therefore important to acknowledge the deeply personalised historicised experience that motivates them.<sup>36</sup>

What is significant, however, is that this affective engagement with the homefront is not made at the expense of teaching people about the war and the testimony of members of *UK Homefront* makes it clear that sharing knowledge about the homefront is equally important.<sup>37</sup> Ian Day argues that 'when people come to an event that we're at and they learn one thing about World War Two we've succeeded in what we're doing. It might be a little trifle that they've picked up, 'I didn't know such and such was used'... but you go to an event like this and you learn something'.<sup>38</sup> Retired teacher Mark Best admitted that 'once a teacher always a teacher' and that he

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<sup>34</sup> Carol Deane, Interview, February 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory volume one: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 175 - 176.

<sup>36</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> O'Brien Backhouse, 'Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses', p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> Ian Day, Interview, August, 2015.

found it hard not to talk to people about the parts of the group's displays that they were curious about.<sup>39</sup> Significantly, the impulse to teach is felt by nearly all members of the group, and often despite their backgrounds.

Struggling with dyslexia, Sandra had never enjoyed history at school and it was only when she started to re-enact that she became passionate about the Second World War. For Sandra, re-enacting became a way of teaching people about the contribution of working-class women to the war effort and she attends events because she wants to make people aware of that contribution.<sup>40</sup> When I asked Sandra Day if she ever thought that she would teach people about the Second World War she replied, 'No. Not in this lifetime'.<sup>41</sup> Simon Kerstin echoes this sentiment; for him, history at school had been boring and his interest had instead been in the sciences. Subsequently he became a civil engineer working on roads and infrastructure. When he started re-enacting he thought it would be parading around in costume but it soon became about teaching; now when he re-enacts he actively looks to educate his audience about the homefront. Rather than a minor aspect of re-enacting, what inspires Simon to re-enact is:

...passing on that knowledge, it's learning, I have to learn to pass it on, I don't know everything and I never will, but I [re-enact], to pass that knowledge on and I meet people who know things that I don't and it becomes a two-way street in so far as I end up learning and teaching the young kids and try to inspire them to go off and do a bit of additional research themselves.<sup>42</sup>

For Simon, re-enacting is not about 'parading or showing off... and looking like a polished peacock', it is about talking to the public and teaching them about the homefront and the success of an event is often judged through the quality of the interactions with the public.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as the research film clearly shows, the failure of Simon's Road Up display was largely due to the poor reception it received from the public.

An important aspect of this impulse to educate is the desire by the re-enactors to make interventions into the public understanding of the homefront, particularly with aspects of the war that they feel are unfairly absent from other forms of public history.

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Best, Interview, August 2015.

<sup>40</sup> This aspect of her re-enacting is discussed in terms of cultural memory in Chapter Three.

<sup>41</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

This is illustrated by the subject matter of Sandra Day's re-enacting. In informal interviews with Sandra during the course of my fieldwork, she would often discuss how there was very little information about the history of washing available to her in books, on websites or at museums and would criticise the lack of courses at universities that would have allowed her to formally study the history of washing. Unable to pursue her interest in the history of washing through more conventional channels Sandra found re-enacting to be a focus and outlet for her interests in this aspect of the homefront, encouraging her to continue re-enacting at events.<sup>44</sup> Not only is re-enacting a practical outlet for her research it is also a way for her to inform people about the contribution of working-class women to the war effort.

For many re-enactors, affectively engaging with the past is a cornerstone of how they re-enact *and* also how they share their knowledge with their audiences. Discussing his and his wife's approach to sharing their knowledge with an audience, Steve Johnson describes how his:

wife does a wash day and she doesn't just stand there, she shows people how the equipment was used and encourages them to handle it. And I, like I say, I like to not just sit down as a static display but I like to walk about and interact with people because that's something that we think is important, that interaction with the public.<sup>45</sup>

Not only do members of the public have the opportunity to get the same sense of 'feel' that re-enactors experience through talking to re-enactors and handling period artefacts, but the re-enactors and objects on display often encourage a personal connection with the past. Typically, members of the public identify their own family histories and personal experiences in the material culture on display; throughout my fieldwork people would respond to the household goods on display, the soaps and the dried milk tins, objects that they had owned or come into contact with as children or associated with their parents or grandparents. For example, one fifteen-minute conversation between a re-enactor and a member of the public began because the member of the public saw a

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<sup>44</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Steve Johnson, Interview, September 2013.

wedding dress on display that was like her grandmother's wedding dress that she still had at home.<sup>46</sup>

Members of *UK Homefront* are therefore highly motivated by the desire to educate their audience about the homefront. Indeed, rather than view hobby re-enactors as interested primarily in terms of immersion in the past, their practices can be fruitfully analysed in terms of their desire to educate the public. This idea informs the following two sections which discuss how they perform at events and how they frame their encounter with their audiences.

## **2. Framing re-enactment events as an educational encounter**

At an event the group mainly do what they term 'show-and-tell' re-enacting, where members of the group display their collections for other re-enactors and members of the public to look at.<sup>47</sup> These displays offer an opportunity for the public to touch, handle, and use the material culture of the period, as well as speak to and ask questions of the re-enactors, who in turn are eager to inform and enlighten their audience. As one member of the group points out, 'you want them to engage and talk about it. You wouldn't spend all the time packing [objects from your collection] up and bringing it out if you didn't want people to see it'.<sup>48</sup> At most events the group are just part of the attractions on offer and they re-enact alongside attractions like staged battles, tea dancing, vintage stalls, food and drink stalls, and military vehicles on show. Given hobby re-enacting's depiction in popular culture as a fun, recreational activity that is rarely afforded the same educational status as living history performances,<sup>49</sup> audiences rarely attend events with the same expectations of learning that they would have if they were visiting a museum, say; knowledge production, or learning, is just one of the relationships or transactions that occurs at these events which are predominantly depicted as places for socialising and fun.<sup>50</sup> For a group strongly motivated by teaching, it is therefore important that *UK Homefront* signify to their audience that what they do is

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<sup>46</sup> This discussion occurred at Lytham-st-Annes in August 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Of the 14 events the group attended in 2014, 10 were 'show-and-tell' events.

<sup>48</sup> Michelle Bridges, Interview, February 2014.

<sup>49</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> See: John Falk, 'An Identity-Centered Approach to Understanding Museum Learning', *Curator* 46(2), (2006), pp. 151-66,



educational and this section looks at the strategies the group use to foster this relationship.

In order to understand what type of relationship the group establish with their audience this section examines how the encounter between themselves and their audience is ‘framed’. This approach draws on the work of Erving Goffman to consider how invisible frames are constructed around social events that influence how they are ‘read’ by people. Jenny Kidd argues that frame analysis ‘is an approach which allows for an unpacking of the assumptions inherent in the discourse of a “schemata of interpretation” or “frame”’ and helps to understand the ways in which social experience is understood and its meaningfulness to the parties involved. Within the scholarship on the museum and heritage sector, frame analysis has been used to understand the quality of engagement that audiences have with a performance.<sup>51</sup> For instance, Anthony Jackson argues that both the quality of engagement and the extent of learning taking place at a theatre performance within a museum or gallery largely depend on the way that the experience is organised and framed through the cultural context of the site and the performance style of the practitioners.<sup>52</sup> This section uses frame analysis to illuminate how the group create a space where their audience can engage with hobby re-enacting not only as a pleasurable encounter, but also as an opportunity to learn.

This section examines three organising frames at *UK Homefront*’s ‘show-and-tell’ re-enactments. First, it analyses how the site of a re-enactment event, such as a museum or village green, frames the group. This effect can be seen as the institutional frame, which refers to the institutional context within which the performance event is located and within which it will be read and understood.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, it considers the role that authenticity plays in framing the group’s re-enacting. Finally, this section considers the use of space within any given site, examining how audiences negotiate the space and understand what to expect from the encounter with the re-enactors.

*UK Homefront* re-enact at various sites around the north of England and Wales and these sites include museums, other heritage sites, marquees on village greens and

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<sup>51</sup> Anthony Jackson & Helen Rees Leahy, ‘Seeing it for real ...?’—Authenticity, theatre and learning in museums’, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 10:3, (2005), p. 310.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Jackson, ‘Engaging the Audience’, in Jackson Jenny Kidd (eds.), *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation*, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Jackson, ‘Engaging the Audience’, p. 17.

shops in high streets. Given the variety of sites that the group re-enacts at, they offer an interesting insight into how the institutional context of an event frames re-enactors and influences how the event is read by the public. Much of the work on living history and education has focused upon site-specific performances at heritage sites that use living history professionals and much has been made of the role that the institution plays upon how re-enacting is read by the audience. In his work on living history performances at heritage sites in North America, Scott Magelssen notes the significance that the venue plays in shaping the relationship between re-enactor and public, and argues that the ‘power of the institution’ plays a considerable role in influencing the encounter between re-enactor and the public as educational.<sup>54</sup>

A similar institutional frame affects *UK Homefront* when they re-enact at a museum or heritage site and they are able to take advantage of the authority of the institutions that they are re-enacting in, framing their re-enacting as part of the educational experience of the museum visit.<sup>55</sup> For example, between 2008 and 2014 the group re-enacted at Chesterfield Museum where they were able to exhibit their displays alongside those of the museum (see figure 2.1 and 2.2). As well as physically occupying a space that most audiences would recognise as educational, by re-enacting within a museum in an official capacity the group were afforded the status of experts and teachers, present on the site in order to educate the public. One member of staff confirmed as much: ‘the public can come round and ask them any questions they have... They’re the experts and we let them get on with it’.<sup>56</sup> Describing the event in 2013, Ian Day told me that:

People have come [to Chesterfield Museum], they’ve talked to us and found out information, seen an artefact rather than seen it on TV and some artefacts we’re happy for them to pick up... and we always explain to people what that character was or what that artefact was. So yeah, it’s unbelievable the amount of people that are educated by what we do and what we show.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, p. 90.

<sup>55</sup> Julia D Harrison, ‘Ideas of museums in the 1990s’, in Gerard Corsane *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 39; Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, p. 90

<sup>56</sup> Chesterfield Museum Attendant, Interview, March 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Ian Day, Interview, March 2013.

By re-enacting at these types of site, the cultural contexts surrounding these institutions help audiences to read and understand *UK Homefront* as part of the learning experience associated with a visit to a museum or heritage site. The site can confer the status of the expert on the re-enactors and helps to frame the group, in the eyes of the public, as authorities on the homefront.



**Figure 2.1** *UK Homefront* at Chesterfield Museum, April 2014. Source: Ben Knowles, 2014.



**Figure 2.2** *UK Homefront* display at Chesterfield Museum February 2013. Source: Ben Knowles, 2013.

The group however frequently re-enact at sites that are not culturally defined as educational institutions, such as village greens or high streets, and at events like 1940s weekends that are primarily about entertainment – with an emphasis upon activities like tea dancing – rather than learning about the war. For example in 2014 50% of their events were held at sites that were neither museums or heritage sites.<sup>58</sup> The group are therefore unable to rely upon the cultural context surrounding these events and instead have to use other strategies to frame their practice as educational.

At these sites, one strategy for framing the encounter between re-enactor and visitor as educational involves an emphasis on authenticity. Much has been written about re-enactors relationship with authenticity and re-enactors and academics alike

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<sup>58</sup> See Appendix 1 for a list of events attended by *UK Homefront* in 2013 and 2014 and which shows the dates of events, venues, and whether the venues can be classified as museums, heritage sites, or ‘other’, such as Colwyn Bay high street.

have described authenticity as ‘the holy grail’ of re-enacting.<sup>59</sup> Thompson has argued that authenticity is a crucial part of how re-enactors acquire and animate the look and feel of history and has been seen as an integral part of how they achieve a sense of immersion in a historical period.<sup>60</sup> Stephen Gapps also identifies authenticity as a currency on the re-enactment circuit, where attitudes to authenticity not only differentiate between those who are serious about the hobby and those who see it as a bit of fun but also view authenticity as evidence of a re-enactors research into a time period, working as the equivalent of the footnote to the historian.<sup>61</sup> While these views of authenticity were supported by the views of members of *UK Homefront*,<sup>62</sup> I want to argue that for hobby re-enactors, particularly when operating outside of museums or heritage sites, authenticity can also be understood as an important framing device that works to legitimise re-enactors in the eyes of their audiences and visibly positions them as experts, with the authority to talk in public about the homefront.

Authenticity is in this sense similar to how some scholars have seen authenticity operate in museums. Scott Magelssen argues that the degree to which a museum’s historical environment is seen as authentic has less to do with an ontological category of ‘authenticity’, and much more to do with how the museum has managed its reputation as a rigorous, authoritative institution, and the degree to which visitors perceive and put stock in this reputation.<sup>63</sup> At a heritage site or museum perceived as authentic, visitors are able to encounter the past in a way that encourages learning. And, as Spencer R. Crew and James E Simms suggest in their work on museums, authenticity is about authority, ‘enforc[ing] the social contract between the audience and the museum, a socially agreed-upon reality that exists only as long as confidence in the voice of the

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<sup>59</sup> For example: Gapps, ‘Mobile monuments’, p. 396 - 398; Jenny Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of Twentieth-Century War Reenactors* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), pp. 206 - 210; de Groot, *Consuming History*, pp. 106 - 108; McCalman and Pickering, ‘From Realism to the Affective Turn’, pp. 1 - 2.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, *War Games*, p. 209 - 210.

<sup>61</sup> Gapps, ‘Mobile monuments’, p. 398.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Simon’s description of replicas as ‘inert’ in *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 22.44 - 26.03.

<sup>63</sup> Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, p. xiv.

exhibition holds'.<sup>64</sup> Authenticity works similarly with hobby re-enactors and can frame the encounter between public and re-enactor as primarily educational.

This use of authenticity as frame can be seen in various instances at *UK Homefront* events. The first encounter with the group by the public is often through the group's banner, placed prominently outside the venue where they are re-enacting. The banner identifies *UK Homefront* as a living history group, rather than a re-enactment group and proclaims that the group are 'Bringing History to Life'. This not only mobilises the language used by heritage sites to signify the use of re-enactment for educational purposes, but also foregrounds the group's educational aims and helps to establish a reputation with the visitor as both informed and authoritative.<sup>65</sup>

Once visitors cross over the threshold and enter into the space occupied by the group they are confronted by further signs that the group are authentic, most prominently through the varied display of objects from the homefront. Throughout my research the first questions asked by members of the public were frequently if objects are 'real' and, if so, how old they are.<sup>66</sup> Time and again the public were impressed to find out that the objects on display were from the period and preserved by the re-enactor. In turn, when speaking to the public, the re-enactors repeatedly stress the 'real', the authenticity of what is on display – both on the tables and worn on their own bodies. Authentic uniforms, badges, glasses, gas masks etc. are cast as signifiers of expertise and, through their possession of wartime material culture, the group are made visible as experts on the homefront. Furthermore, the highly visible presence of 'real' objects gives the audience confidence in the voice of the exhibition, similar to that identified by Crew and Ellis in museums. The authentic is loudly and visibly proclaimed, framing the encounter between audience and re-enactor in such a way as to inspire confidence in the audience and create an encounter between hobby re-enactors and audience that is similar to that experienced by people in museums.

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<sup>64</sup> Spencer R. Crew and James E Simms, 'Locating authenticity: fragments of a dialogue', in Karp and Lavine (eds.) *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (London: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> Clemons, 'Present Enacting Past', p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> An example of this type of exchange is in *Re-enacting the Second World War* when two members of the public speak to Simon about objects on his Bevin Boy display. See: *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 14.56 - 17.30.

The authentic can also be seen to underpin the occupations that each re-enactor chooses to portray. Members of the group are critical of other re-enactors that choose to portray roles that they think are inauthentic because of age and instead choose occupations that they perceive as realistic given their age and gender.<sup>67</sup> For example, Steve Johnson attends events as an ARP warden and he argues that ‘I try to stay as much in character to the sort of person and age I am, which is the main reason not to portray military. I’m beyond military age so I’m a civilian doing a responsible civilian job in wartime’.<sup>68</sup> Similarly John Smith, a recent member of the group, suggests that ‘the character that I might want to introduce later to the group is that of an ARP warden because what I find essential when I’m re-enacting is authenticity. I’m now 67 years old so if I’m going to re-enact 1940 I’m going to be 67 years old. And I wouldn’t be a paratrooper... I would be a home guard, I would be an ARP warden’.<sup>69</sup>

As well as being physically believable, re-enactors use research to ensure that when they speak to the public this authentic exterior is supported by knowledge and expertise about the portrayed occupation. In an interview with Ian Day he suggested that:

In re-enacting the one thing that is the most difficult to find is your character, what you want to re-enact as and for some people it can take years, some people have half a dozen characters that they re-enact as. It’s whatever you feel comfortable as and then once you get a character that you feel comfortable as you can look into what that character would have done, even down to what he would have ate, what he would have done working, the lot, so people can come up to and ask what are you, what are you re-enacting as.<sup>70</sup>

The desire to be able to be both knowledgeable and believable when talking to their audience is shared by all the members of the group and underpins their performances. For the re-enactors within *UK Homefront* the insistence on portraying realistic personas

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<sup>67</sup> A frequent subject of criticism by some members of the group are the men in their fifties and sixties that portray the American 101st Airborne Division and are seen as inauthentic and faintly ludicrous. This idea of hierarchy within re-enacting based on authenticity will be discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Steve Johnson, Interview, August 2015.

<sup>69</sup> John Smith, Interview, August 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Ian Day, Interview, August 2015.

helps to create a relationship with audience and re-enactor that supports the educational framing.

An example of how authenticity frames the encounter between re-enactor and the public can be seen in a research clip from an event at Lytham-St-Annes in 2014 which shows members of the public queuing to enter the marquee where the group have set their displays up.<sup>71</sup> By the entrance is the banner, informing the public that what they are about to see is living history. The clip then shows an edited discussion between Michelle Bridges and two members of the public, a man and a woman, about the display about wartime weddings. Michelle discusses the aims of the group ('we're all interested in preserving the 1940s homefront... so we have our own collections) and then talks about various aspects of the display such as the headdress ('I've got the original box that this came in') and wedding dress. They then discuss the cardboard cake on display and Michelle explains that they were used because of rationing. The man asks if the cake is original. Tellingly, Michelle replies that it is not but that it is based on one in Birmingham Museum, stressing the rigorous research that has gone into the display. Finally, the man expresses how impressed he is that these objects have been preserved. In this example authenticity frames their discussion, with Michelle using the aims of the group, the authenticity of the objects, and the rigour of their research to establish a reputation with the couple as informed and authoritative. The response of the couple to the display arguably conveys the success of this framing ('It's great... to keep all these things alive and show what people were doing at the time').

There are, however, moments at events where the group's framing as authentic is complicated; members of *UK Homefront* can be seen using smartphones to take photographs, eating crisps or drinking from cans. Whilst these moments are neither continuous nor prolific, they do occur and, using Crew and Ellis's notion of authenticity, they can be perceived as moments that undermine the audiences' confidence in the group's ability to discuss the history of the homefront. However, despite these highly visible inaccuracies the public are capable of differentiating between the necessary authentic, such as period clothes and objects, and the unnecessary authentic, such as period food or even speech. An audience's confidence in the 'voice' of a re-enactment as authentic can hold despite the presence of anachronisms like drinks cans or chocolate

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<sup>71</sup> See <https://filmingthepast.com/lytham-st-annes-2015/>



bars and re-enactors and audiences are capable of negotiating ideas of authenticity in such a way that the presence of the inauthentic does not cancel out the positive impressions created by the authentic.

Furthermore I believe that this process of negotiation, of being aware of both the authentic and inauthentic at once, is inevitable, even if the re-enactor goes to extreme lengths to create an accurate portrayal of a figure from the past. This idea draws on Schneider's work where she argues that, rather than their 'common depiction as, by and large, simple or naive "enthusiasts"', the re-enactors that she spoke to were well aware of simultaneous temporal registers and the impossibility of re-enacting without any sense of anachronism.<sup>72</sup> Both audience and re-enactor are aware of the everywhere of error, and neither the re-enactor nor the audience member can ever be fully immersed into the past because of the inevitable 'nowness' of the encounter, the sights and sounds of the twenty-first century which are always present for both parties.

This idea of authenticity as a framing device complicates the popular perception portrayed in the scholarship that re-enactment groups do not tolerate the inauthentic at events. As a consequence, academics have viewed authenticity as a limit on re-enacting's ability to discuss the past. For example, in his discussion of the *Sealed Knot*, a British re-enactment group specialising in the English Civil War, de Groot uses a group-wide warning that 'mixing seventeenth and twentieth century clothing styles is unacceptable when performing re-enactment events in front of any audience' to highlight their desire for absolute commitment to historical realism.<sup>73</sup> For de Groot, this seemingly unshakeable commitment to authenticity hinders re-enactors ability to generate historical insights; whilst it is possible to argue that the postmodern play involved in dressing up for re-enacting seems to undermine any fixed conception of 'history' or 'social' identity, the emphasis on authenticity orders and disciplines the practice and curtails its ability to depart from historical 'facts'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the focus on accuracy seemingly sacrifices re-enactors ability to address wider historical questions or issues that fall outside the bodily or the technical.<sup>75</sup> From this perspective a re-enactor

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<sup>72</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 106.

<sup>74</sup> de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 106.

<sup>75</sup> Agnew, 'What is Reenactment?', pp. 330 - 333.

like Simon Kerstin would be able to talk about the correct way to use an air raid siren, but be less able to venture into questions about masculinity during the war.

The practice of *UK Homefront* however suggests that authenticity acts to frame re-enactors as informed and knowledgeable and, rather than limiting the types of discussions that a re-enactor can have with their audience, authenticity instead provides historical context for the discussion, in this case about the homefront. Instead of constraining the possible discussions between re-enactor and public, authenticity helps to frame the encounter as one where both the re-enactor and the member of the public can think about, discuss, and learn about the war. Furthermore, the presence of the inauthentic alongside the authentic weakens the barriers between re-enactor and audience, and helps to mitigate the potential awkwardness of the encounter, creating a space where the re-enactors are both visible experts *and* approachable.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, their imitation of the spatial arrangement of a museum is a key aspect of how the group frames their re-enacting. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out that ‘Exhibition is how museums stage knowledge. They do this by the way they arrange objects... in space and by how they install the visitor’.<sup>77</sup> *UK Homefront* use similar models of exhibition and display to frame their re-enacting as educational. The behavioural codes that govern museum visits, of focused looking, of expecting to learn, are mobilised by the group through their use of space;<sup>78</sup> displays are arranged around the edges of the available spaces and members of the public are encouraged to circulate around the space so that they encounter each aspect of the homefront in a way that is reminiscent of being in a museum (see figure 2.3 which shows how displays are arranged using similar museum strategies or akin to pop up exhibitions in order to maximise audience engagement with objects).

Kirshneblatt-Gimblett points out that over the last 25 years museums have changed their relationship to their collections and to exhibition as a medium. She argues

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<sup>76</sup> As scenes in *Re-enacting the Second World War* show, when re-enactors display their collections there is considerable audience engagement. See: *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 14.56 - 17.30.

<sup>77</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Performance Studies’ in Henry Bial (ed.), *The Performance Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 50.

<sup>78</sup> Helen Rees Leahy, ‘Watching me, watching you: performance and performativity in the museum’, in Jackson and Kidd (eds.), *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation*, pp. 29 - 30.

that ‘If anything, museums and their exhibitions have become more theatrical - even operatic - than ever... to the point that museums are established without collections and exhibitions may not feature objects’.<sup>79</sup> Whilst members of *UK Homefront* are aware of the recent changes to display strategies within museums, the group’s displays echo older, more traditional exhibition practices. Objects are arranged thematically, labelled, and texts that explain objects place the themes of the display within the wider, historical context of the war (see figure 2.4). Talking about the Imperial War Museum North, one re-enactor suggested that:

it’s a little bit sparse in places ... It’s not like the one in London but it is good... It is very modern. With only a few things in the display cabinets... but nobody does homefront like we do! When you go somewhere like the Imperial War Museum North it’s all behind glass and it’s just pamphlets and it doesn’t give you that...[pauses and gestures towards her display] it’s nice to be able to get up close to some small things.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore the majority of *UK Homefront*’s displays focus on the culturally significant aspects of the war that are an established part of the historical narratives about the homefront, such as rationing and civil defence, and this encourages the public to recognise these displays as important, relating to a significant historical moment worthy of focused looking and reflection. The familiarity of their display style helps the group to frame the encounter between re-enactor and visitor as educational and allows the visitor to draw upon previous experiences of museums to position themselves in relation to the objects and the re-enactors.

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<sup>79</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Performance Studies’, p. 50.

<sup>80</sup> See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Performance Studies’, p. 50; Michelle Bridges, Interview, Chesterfield, February 2013.



**Figure 2.3** *UK Homefront Display* at Midlands Railway Museum, June 2014. Source: Ben Knowles, 2014.



**Figure 2.4** Carol Dene's *Rationing During the War* display, Chesterfield Museum, February 2013. Source: Ben Knowles, 2013.

By echoing the spatial arrangement and display style of a museum the group are able to take advantage of what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies as a ‘museum effect’, in which the setting changes the standards for experiencing objects. When a museum identifies certain objects as worthy of display, they take on a special significance. Artefacts arranged in museums are not important because they create a different time, but because of the very fact that a curatorial institution has chosen to display them.<sup>81</sup> In the case of *UK Homefront* they present themselves as a curatorial institution and visitors are encouraged to take seriously the items on display. Everyday 1940s objects like butter dishes, a mangle, a broach, or a washboard, are artefacts that are not usually subject to formal viewing let alone an implied historical significance and this prompts questions about what visitors are seeing; what is important about a powdered milk tin from 1941? Why has someone taken the time and effort to find, buy, store and then display these objects? What do these objects have to do with the history of the Second World War? Like objects in museums, the value of the group’s objects are not inherent but rather an attribute bestowed upon them by their inclusion in the group’s displays and their meaning is altered by the group’s recontextualization of the objects in a ‘show-and-tell’ setting.<sup>82</sup> The group create a space where people are encouraged to approach what they do as educational, rather than as entertainment and, by inviting the public to look at everyday objects from the 1940s, the group create encounters with the material culture of the war that encourages reflection upon their significance in wider historical narratives.<sup>83</sup>

Framing not only influences how the public approach the group but it also influences how the public and re-enactors interact with each other. Scholars have argued that the relationship between the public and re-enactors is often a balancing act between a re-enactor’s desire for immersion in a historical period and audience interaction, with immersion the priority. The English civil war re-enactors that O’Brien Backhouse worked with, for example, described the most enjoyable events as ‘the ones in which the experiences were “good” – when the surroundings, the camp itself, the activities and the

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<sup>81</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture: tourism, museums, and heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 50 - 54.

<sup>82</sup> D. C. Stam, ‘The informed muse: the implications of the “The New Museology” for museum practice’, in Corsane, (ed.), *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, p. 57.

<sup>83</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture*, pp. 47 - 49: *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 14.56 - 17.30.

level of authenticity all work together and the feeling of the past is evoked'.<sup>84</sup> Despite the majority of their events taking place in front of a public audience, rather than make interactions with the public a priority O'Brien Backhouse suggests that the group would typically arrange their camp at events to create an immersive experience for the re-enactors. As a consequence, they tended to be sat with their backs to their audience and further separated from the public by a barrier of seventeenth-century camp life.<sup>85</sup> Site, display and authenticity in these instances offer a re-enactor a sense of absorption into the past, but frame the encounter between re-enactor and audience in such a way as to limit the amount of interaction between the two.

*UK Homefront*, in contrast, offers an example of how the relationship between hobby re-enactors and their audience can be framed in such a way as to increase the likelihood of audience interaction. A good example of this process can be seen in the mixed results of Simon Kerstin's 'Road-Up' scenario at Ellesmere Port in 2014, a scene included in the accompanying film.<sup>86</sup> Despite the considerable efforts he went to, the public largely ignored his display of road building equipment from the war. In part this was because road building, unlike other aspects of the homefront such as Air Raid Wardens, is not part of the wider cultural memory of the war; members of the public were initially uncertain of the intention of the display, typically asking Simon 'where the bomb was?' in the mistaken belief that the display was about the blitz rather than road repairs.<sup>87</sup> However, Simon also recognised the problems inherent in the style of the display he initially adopted:

I have objects that people can come and look at when I'm doing the Bevin Boy and the ARP whereas with the road works it's a diorama rather than a display – I suppose people could walk up and use the shovel if they really wanted to – but again it's different because it is a diorama. It puts a little bit of distance between me and the public whereas with the other displays I'm up close, I can latch onto them and talk to them, that's probably why people don't talk to me as much when I'm doing the road works, especially as I tend to be asleep and go for the reaction that

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<sup>84</sup> O'Brien Backhouse, 'Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses', p. 127.

<sup>85</sup> O'Brien Backhouse, 'Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses', p. 127.

<sup>86</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 26.10 - 33.15, 42.49 - 46.28.

<sup>87</sup> Simon's 'Road Up' display is also discussed in terms of cultural memory in Chapter Three.

way... People like to stop and look at me, asleep under my cap but you can't really speak to anyone that way!<sup>88</sup>

In response to the relative failure of this display, Simon's subsequent road building displays saw the barriers moved to the back, and object labels as well as information panels about road building during the war added. The diorama shifted from one where audiences felt that they should look and observe rather than interact, to a display where they could speak to Simon, handle objects, and find out how road building changed during the war.

As Simon's experience with his road building display illustrates, how a re-enactment event is framed - through the use of space and display - influences how it is read by audiences and can dramatically change the relationship between re-enactor and audience. Whilst hobby re-enactment can be framed as primarily entertaining for both the re-enactor immersed in the past and the public who are encouraged to be spectators, an analysis of the frames that surround *UK Homefront's* re-enacting suggests that hobby re-enacting can also be understood as an educational encounter between re-enactors and the public. By adopting similar framing techniques to museums, it is telling that members of the public have described the group as a 'mobile museum'.<sup>89</sup>

### **3. Moments of disruption in *UK Homefront's* re-enacting**

The third and final section of this chapter examines the moments of disruption, rather than immersion, at re-enactment events and the impact that these moments have on the relationship between re-enactors and the public, particularly with regards to the dynamics of spectatorship and the acquisition of knowledge. In order to examine the dynamics between the group's performance at events and their relationship with their audience, this section draws on Alison Landsberg's work on the relationship between the experiential mode of engagement and the acquisition of historical knowledge. Using R. G. Collingwood's work on re-enacting, Landsberg stresses the importance of self-reflexivity to the production of historical knowledge:

If one is not *conscious* that one is re-enacting an historical event, then one is not thinking historically. In other words, "Historical thinking is an activity... which is a

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<sup>88</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, October 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Ian Day, Interview, August 2014.

function of self-consciousness, a form of thought possible only to a mind which knows itself to be thinking that way".<sup>90</sup>

Landsberg argues that for popular texts to produce historical knowledge it is necessary to both invite viewers into the experience and encourage them to engage affectively with the material, and ensure that the viewers are held at a distance, reminding them that the past was substantially different.<sup>91</sup> Using close analysis of films like *Milk* (Gus van Sant, 2008) and television series like *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) Landsberg suggests that re-enactment in these mediums is a mode or methodology that does not 'inevitably foster the illusion that one is actually inhabiting the past'.<sup>92</sup> Through the use of various disruptive, stylistic and formal devices, such as interruptions of the visual field or alienating language, historical knowledge can therefore be produced in interesting and provocative ways by a range of popular representations of the past.

For example, in her discussion of *Mad Men* Landsberg identifies the social mores and values of the period as one such method of encouraging distance in the viewer; characters are casually racist, sexist and anti-Semitic and these social values tend to work against immersion in the narrative, often shocking the viewer in a way that breaks the narrative illusion and forces them to consider the difference between then and now.<sup>93</sup> These disruptive devices ensure that viewers are placed in situations where they never fully slip into absorption or identification but instead are encouraged into an act of thinking.<sup>94</sup>

This act of thinking – what Landsberg calls the 'distracted mode'<sup>95</sup> – produces historical knowledge and fosters in the audience a kind of historical consciousness. This idea is similar to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, the distancing effect that he advocated in his writings and practice and which creates the critical separation between a performer or spectator and a play which is necessary for thought.<sup>96</sup> This section takes this idea of a distracted mode of engagement and applies it to *UK Homefront's*

<sup>90</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 90.

<sup>93</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 91.

<sup>94</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 6 – 10, pp. 90 - 91.

<sup>95</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: third edition*, edited by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn, translated by Jack Davis, Romy Fursland, Steve Giles, Victoria Hill, Kristopher Imbrigotta, Marc Silberman and John Willett (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 4.



performance practice, and argues that this type of engagement is particularly prevalent at *UK Homefront* re-enactment events. By looking at re-enactors performance spaces and how they publicly perform, this section examines these moments when, rather than the sense of immersion that has been the focus of much of the research, re-enactors and public alike experience a distracted mode of engagement. This section focuses on *how* they advance these interpretations, rather than the specific historical interpretations that their re-enacting advance.

If one approaches the group's activities at events from the perspective of a distracted mode of engagement it becomes clear that the relationship between re-enactor and public can often be a messy, dynamic process. One factor that continually generates disruptive interactions between re-enactor and public is the site of the re-enactment. Much of the scholarship on hobby re-enacting has focused on how the physical environment contributes to the sense of immersion felt by re-enactors or the public. Living history museums in America such as the Pilgrim Village at Plimoth Plantation go to great lengths to create a site where audiences can have the most immersive experience possible and through an emphasis upon authenticity, accuracy, and the ability to control their environment they aim to create the illusion of stepping back in time. Scott Magelssen argues that these institutions 'operate on the assumption that one can pass over a threshold that marks the border between the present instant and a representation of a past instant', made possible by ensuring that the built environment is as accurate a recreation of a specific time period as possible.<sup>97</sup> At the Pilgrim Village for instance they advertise the museum as a 'believable slice of 1627 life' and part of the appeal is that visitors can physically feel like they are stepping into the year 1627.<sup>98</sup> These sites are explicitly educational, but they look to make the experience for both re-enactor and visitor as immersive as possible.

Hobby re-enactors are rarely able to exert the same the degree of control over their physical environment but nevertheless they go to great lengths to foster a similarly immersive experience. By re-enacting periods, rather than specific events, hobby re-enactors are able to mount events at sites that offer realistic, naturalistic environments where they are able to experience moments of total immersion. Discussing military re-

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<sup>97</sup> Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, pp. 23 – 25.

<sup>98</sup> Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, p. 86.

enactors in the US, Jenny Thompson highlighted how the group she researched used generic fields or woodland in the US to stand in for general landscapes such as France during the First World War that could give them the feeling of being there in 1916.<sup>99</sup> The English Civil War re-enactors that O'Brien Backhouse worked with described the most enjoyable events as 'the ones in which the experiences were "good" – when the surroundings, the camp itself, the activities and the level of authenticity all work together and the feeling of the past is evoked'.<sup>100</sup> The scholarship on hobby re-enacting strongly argues that the activity is, for the participant a primarily immersive experience, and once this immersion in the past occurs it is often hard for the re-enactor to transition out of the past and into the present.<sup>101</sup>

This research has primarily examined hobby re-enactors who practice at sites suited to creating authentic illusions of the past. My own research suggests that such interpretations present hobby re-enacting as a more immersive experience than it often is in practice. During my four years of fieldwork with *UK Homefront* they typically took part in events at sites that made total immersion far more problematic. For example, at a 1940s weekend event at Colwyn Bay in 2014 the group set up their display in one of the vacant shops on the high street. Even after they had prepared the site, the space's recent past as a 'Furniture and Electricals' shop was all too apparent from the sign over the entrance (see figure 2.5 and 2.6). Similarly, at a 1940s weekend in Lytham-St-Anne's the group set up their displays in a marquee on the village green, surrounded by both Axis and Allies military re-enactors (see figure 2.7 and 2.8). This is also evident in the research film; Sandra's working class washing display for example is shown on the lawn of a country house and in an auditorium.<sup>102</sup>

The overwhelming presence of the twenty first century, the *nowness* of the event, makes it far harder for both re-enactor and audience to feel immersed in wartime Britain in the same way that a military re-enactor in a field can feel immersed in the American Civil War, or a visitor to a living history museum can be swept up in the environment and feel as if they have crossed a threshold into a different time. Instead, of total immersion in the past - to be physically experienced by a re-enactor and observed by the

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<sup>99</sup> Thompson, *War Games*, p. 157.

<sup>100</sup> O'Brien Backhouse, 'Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses', p. 127.

<sup>101</sup> Agnew, 'Introduction', p. 330.

<sup>102</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 2.59 - 8.56, 33.16 - 42.48.

public - a different type of relationship is established that helps this group of re-enactors not only to engage affectively with the homefront, but also share their knowledge with their audience.



**Figure 2.5 Shop for *UK Homefront* display, Colwyn Bay 18 April 2015. Source: Ben Knowles, 2015.**



**Figure 2.6** Man looking at *UK Homefront Mining Display*, Colwyn Bay 18 April 2015.  
**Source:** Ben Knowles, 2015.



**Figure 2.7** Marquee for *UK Homefront display*, Lytham St Annes, 18 August 2014.  
**Source:** Ben Knowles, 2014.





**Figure 2.8 Simon Kerstin talking to an audience about Bevin Boys, Lytham St Annes, 18 August 2014. Source: Ben Knowles, 2014.**

As scenes in the film show, during an event a member of the public will stop at a re-enactors display and for a brief moment, or five minutes, or even half an hour, they and the re-enactor will talk about aspects of the homefront, and see, touch, feel, and use objects from the period.<sup>103</sup> It is a moment of encounter, where one's body is provoked and addressed, an affective response is elicited and both the re-enactor and the member of the public are brought into proximity with the homefront.<sup>104</sup> Another example of this was at an event in Colwyn Bay, a woman whose father was a miner in the 1970s stopped and spoke to Simon Kerstin, dressed as a Bevin Boy, about her family's connection to the industry and the role that it played in the war (see figure 2.9). In the exchange both re-enactor and audience member affectively engage with the history of the war through family history and personal experiences. However affect is not identification or submersion into the past and rather than both re-enactor and audience completely crossing an imagined threshold into the 1940s, the physical environment helps to

<sup>103</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 14.56 - 17.30.

<sup>104</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 19 – 20.

complicate this immersion.<sup>105</sup> The realities of the situation are too substantial to be ignored; despite the best efforts of the group both Simon and the woman are in a recognisably a modern shop; there is a Saturday market outside the shop where food, toys, and clothes are sold; the noise of the twenty first century, of people talking, mix with a 1940s song on a gramophone; other members of the public look at the displays and are continually in vision. Any illusion of the past is broken through the continual distractions of the twenty first century, which serve to remind both the re-enactor and their audience of the artificiality of the situation and produce the distance necessary for historical thinking to occur.



**Figure 2.9 Simon Kerstin talking to the public about the Bevin Boys, Colwyn Bay, 14 April 2015. Source: Ben Knowles, 2015.**

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<sup>105</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 20 – 21. See also: <https://filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/>

Whilst this could be perceived as a failure of the group to become fully immersed in the past or to convince their audience that they have crossed a threshold, the physical environment of the spaces within which they re-enact actually encourages both parties to remain conscious of the fact that they are actively engaging with History. Vanessa Agnew has expressed concern that the experiential nature of the engagement (most discussions start through a sharing of personal experience of family history – ‘my mother had one of those’, ‘I did that job’) fosters an easy identification with the past that creates an illusion that one can know in concrete ways what it was like back then.<sup>106</sup> However I would argue that the continual oscillation between the 1940s and the present requires both re-enactor and audience to confront the difference between the past and present and thereby create the possibility that both parties gain some kind of historical insights into the homefront.<sup>107</sup> Landsberg suggests that:

the real potential for the production of knowledge about the past... occurs in those instances where a delicate balance is maintained between drawing individuals into specific scenarios/crises/issues of the past in an affective, palpable way and yet also relentlessly reminding them of their distance and difference from the past – which is also often achieved affectively.<sup>108</sup>

By re-enacting at sites that make clear the artificiality of the experience *UK Homefront* create opportunities for audiences to reflect upon and think about the history of war. Indeed, rather than the apparent stasis and solidity of a living history museum, re-enactors in *UK Homefront* have to be far more flexible and arguably imaginative in creating a space where both they and their audiences can engage with 1940s Britain, both affectively and cognitively.

Just as the sites for hobby re-enacting often create a more nuanced performance than is typically imagined, the approach to character and performance style amongst the group offers similar scope for a nuanced engagement with the homefront by both re-enactor and audience. Whilst the members of the group all choose to portray occupations that are deemed authentic in terms of age and gender, members of the group use performance styles that can best be understood on a spectrum, using styles that oscillate between first-person interpretation in a naturalistic style and third-person

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<sup>106</sup> Agnew, ‘Introduction’, p. 301.

<sup>107</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, pp. 112 – 113.

<sup>108</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 118.

interpretation that makes clear that the re-enactor is portraying an occupation, rather than a specific character.

Amongst the different members of the group, Steve and Sue Johnson best illustrate this point. Steve re-enacts as a railway worker, a character that he can portray with some ease due to his background as a long-term volunteer on a heritage steam railway, and he has perhaps the most detailed character biography in the group. As a man in his early sixties Steve's character was in the Great War, maintaining the narrow gauge railway locomotives that supplied munitions to the trenches. He met his wife Sue when he was recovering from being gassed at the front and Sue was the radiographer treating him. At events Sue re-enacts as a former radiographer and now housewife to reflect the social conventions of women in paid work during the period.<sup>109</sup>

Sue and Steve's performance style is not fixed however but rather it oscillates between first and third person and this continually creates moments where this closeness to the past is challenged and disrupted. Both employ first-person interpretation for part of the time when they re-enact; at an event they sit at what looks like a dining table and throughout the day they have tea and sandwiches, read wartime newspapers and listen to records on their gramophone. They talk to one another about the war and reluctantly tell their audience that they have just missed out on joining them for a cup of tea 'but better luck next time'. However, neither Steve nor Sue remain in character and frequently shift from first-person interpretation to third-person interpretation during interactions with their audience. For example, Steve will complain to Sue about not wanting to have an evacuee stay with them, before then talking at length to whoever has stopped to watch about evacuees during the war. This shift causes very few problems for audiences, and they often join in with the first-person interpretation, for instance by joking about not getting any tea, before breaking with the theatrical performance and asking about something that has caught their attention such as which types of food were exempt from rationing.<sup>110</sup> Even though Sue and Steve are amateurs, re-enacting outside of heritage sites, audiences accept them as both a couple living during the war and re-enactors that

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<sup>109</sup> For the full description of Steve's character when he re-enacts see <https://filmingthepast.com/interview-steve-johnson-lytham-st-annes-august-2015/> Steve Johnson Interview, August 2015.

<sup>110</sup> This process can be seen in the research clip: <https://filmingthepast.com/steve-and-sue-johnson-re-enacting/>



can talk about aspects of the homefront. There is a ‘doubleness’ about these performances, and both re-enactor and audience are happy to negotiate the ‘two contradictory realities’ that are ‘simultaneously in play’ during a re-enactment event.<sup>111</sup>

The ‘doubleness’ of re-enactors performances suggests that concerns about re-enactments pedagogical value may be overstated; fears that participants in historical re-enactment will misread the past by projecting their own contemporary responses backwards underestimates the complexity of interaction between re-enactor and audience.<sup>112</sup> Whilst it has been suggested that ‘reenactment is less concerned with events, processes or structures than with the individual’s physical and psychological experience’, the performances of members of *UK Homefront* suggests that their audiences are encouraged to move between absorption and distraction and to think critically about the past, even when speaking to a re-enactor that initially presents them with a first person interpretation of the homefront.<sup>113</sup>

Landsberg argues that ‘for popular texts to produce historical knowledge requires both that they invite viewers in, encourage them to engage affectively with the material and conditions of the past, and that they hold viewers out, reminding them the past was substantially different from the present’.<sup>114</sup> By approaching *UK Homefront*’s performance through the lens of disruption rather than immersion, it becomes possible to see that re-enactment events are spaces where both re-enactors and the public can adopt a distracted mode of engagement and remain conscious that what they are participating in is a re-enactment. The distracted mode of engagement between both re-enactors and the public suggests that rather than view re-enactors as limited to discussions of physical or psychological experience gleaned from their actions, re-enacting events are spaces where broader discussions of History can take place.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that rather than conceive of hobby re-enacting as a primarily immersive, embodied activity for individuals whose main focus is upon their own

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<sup>111</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: a critical introduction: second edition* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 80; Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 124.

<sup>112</sup> Agnew, ‘History’s affective turn’, p. 301.

<sup>113</sup> Agnew, ‘History’s affective turn’, pp. 301.

<sup>114</sup> Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, p. 90.

experiences, the behaviour of *UK Homefront* illustrates the important role that education can play in shaping how the hobby is practiced. By considering the relationship that re-enactors develop with members of the public through framing and moments of disruption at events one can see that re-enactment is a pedagogical tool that has more scope for broad historical discussions than is currently recognized. Finally, the performance practices of hobby re-enactors can be sophisticated and nuanced and are as worthy of analysis as the performance practices of living history professionals.

## Chapter Three

### Acts of Intervention, Contested Meanings, and Misunderstandings: Cultural Memory and Re-enacting the Second World War

In the previous chapter, hobby re-enacting was presented as a much more nuanced and varied historical and performative practice than scholars have allowed. The significant point argued is that while re-enacting the Second World War is a deep source of personal satisfaction and pleasure for the members of *UK Homefront*, it is also fundamentally regarded as a pedagogical tool within the bounds of popular culture. The practice allows members to connect personal memories of the homefront with the public. For scholars, however, their re-enacting practices enable a discussion of the way in which the cultural memory of ‘the people’s war’ is still resonant in contemporary British society, which emerges as a main theme in the documentary film. Indeed, the cultural memory of the war can be seen at the heart of both Sandra’s and Simon’s experiences and both re-enactors discuss their personas and re-enacting practices in terms of memory.<sup>1</sup> Where film is a medium best suited to revealing the sensory and embodied aspects of cultural memory however, this chapter is an opportunity to bring Sandra’s and Simon’s representations of the homefront into a critical and productive dialogue with the scholarship on the cultural memory of the Second World War.

This chapter assesses Sandra Day’s portrayal of a housewife and Simon Kerstin’s portrayal of a Bevin Boy and a road builder in order to ask three questions about the cultural memory of the homefront. Firstly, by offering space to marginalized voices, does re-enacting provide a vehicle for individuals to make their own contributions to the cultural memory of the war, dominated as it is by public discourses of military veterans and the ‘spirit of the Blitz’?<sup>2</sup> Secondly, following Rebecca Bramall and Michael Rothberg’s thesis on the ‘multidirectionality of memory’, a dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Re-enacting the Second World War: History, Memory and the UK Homefront* (Ben Knowles, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, ‘Introduction: “Keep Calm and Carry On”: The cultural memory of the Second World War in Britain’, in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 7, pp. 15 – 16; Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1, (2004), pp. 75 – 76.

process ‘subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing’, then what does re-enacting reveal about this? <sup>3</sup> Thirdly, why are some memories of the homefront only significant to individuals or highly specialized groups and unable to be integrated into the dominant cultural memory of the war?<sup>4</sup> Underpinning these three questions is a focus on the actions and processes involved in cultural memory that are rendered visible through the re-enacting practices of Sandra and Simon.

This chapter uses cultural memory as a theoretical tool for examining both Sandra and Simon’s re-enactment practice. Memory is a complex and diverse concept used in different disciplines in contested ways. It is therefore important to clarify what this chapter means by cultural memory. The chapter is interested in the ‘cultural memory’ of the home front in Britain in the twenty first century and understands ‘cultural memory’ as memory that is ‘the product of representations and not of direct experience’.<sup>5</sup> Neither Sandra nor Simon experienced the war personally, though they do have tacit memories passed down from their grandparents’ generation. Cultural memory provides a framework for linking that subtle and precarious passage of generational memories and childhood narratives to the present cultural arena in which a subsequent generation has comprised its understanding of a major event, such as the Second World War and the terrain of the homefront.

There is a considerable body of scholarship on the cultural memory of the war. Historians such as Penny Summerfield, Geoff Eley, Lucy Noakes, Sonya Rose and Martin Francis have used museums, films, television, statues, books, websites, and material culture for evidence of how aspects of the Second World War like gender, citizenship, and class have been processed and understood in the years following 1945.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3; Rebecca Bramall, ‘Memory, meaning and multidirectionality: “Remembering” austerity Britain’, in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, pp. 202 – 203.

<sup>4</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, ‘Introduction’, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ann Rigney, ‘Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory’, *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (1), (2005), p. 15; Bramall, ‘Memory, meaning and multidirectionality’, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> See Geoff Eley, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (June, 2001), pp. 818-838; Penny Summerfield, ‘War, film, memory: some reflections on war films and the social configuration of memory in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1(1), (2008), pp. 15 - 23; Lucy Noakes, ‘Making histories: Experiencing the Blitz in London’s museums in the 1990s’, in Martin Evans and Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *War and Memory in the Twentieth*

Along with museums, monuments, archives, classrooms, memorials, rituals, and public acts of commemoration and celebration, re-enactment events are sites of memory where ‘the cultural memory of the war is depicted, discussed, and contested’.<sup>7</sup> Re-enacting however has not been integral to the study of war and memory.

This chapter will address the gap in the scholarship on memory and re-enactment and uses the practices of two members of *UK Homefront* to examine the contemporary cultural memory of the Second World War. The historiography on the Second World War and memory in Britain has identified the contingent nature of cultural memory, ‘in that it is shaped as much by the period in which the war is being “remembered” and represented, as it is by the multifarious experiences of the war themselves’.<sup>8</sup> Since 1945 certain memories and experiences have been emphasised or marginalised at different moments as the sensibilities of the period have changed, evidenced, for example, by the increasing visibility of Bomber Command in contemporary commemoration as well as the renewed focus on women’s wartime experiences and contributions.<sup>9</sup> As such, while certain discourses about the war are dominant, specifically the experiences of military veterans and the notion of the people’s war, there is no single memory of the war that has been unchallenged or contested following 1945.<sup>10</sup> Cultural memory is a dynamic process, marked as much by contestation as by stasis and continuity.

Importantly, re-enacting is a site that can reveal the dynamics involved in constructing cultural memory and is a practice that allows the historian to ‘step beyond the familiar terrain of the archives and engage with the memory of war as it is lived,

*Century* (London: Berg, 1997), pp. 89 - 104; Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Martin Francis ‘Remembering war, forgetting empire? Representations of the North African campaign in 1950s British cinema’, in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, pp. 111 - 132.

<sup>7</sup> Lucy Noakes, ‘“War on the Web”: The BBC’s “People’s War” website and memories of fear in wartime in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain’, in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, p. 48; Jay Winter, ‘Sites of Memory’, in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 312.

<sup>8</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, ‘Introduction’, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Houghton, ‘The “missing chapter”: Bomber Command aircrew memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s’, in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, pp. 155 - 174; Penny Summerfield, ‘Conflict, Power and Gender in women’s memories of the Second World War: a Mass-Observation Study’, *Miranda, revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone*, 1(2), (2010), pp. 1 - 10.

<sup>10</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, ‘Introduction’, p. 17.

imagined and spoken'.<sup>11</sup> It reveals cultural memory to be dynamic since it is negotiated with the self through through personal memories, between individuals, with the public, and through the material culture of the war, particularly as the war generation itself is no longer alive. Thus, in the organisation of re-enactment events, the group must decide and negotiate which roles will be given prominence and which have public meaning, and this is an occasion when the past can also be contested. Through its failures re-enacting can also reveal the power relations that affect cultural memory, when individual interventions are muffled by the dominant narratives of the war.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter the re-enactment practices of Sandra and Simon offer seemingly different insights about cultural memory; Sandra's working-class housewife is understood as a gendered act of contestation and both of Simon's personas reveal the negotiations of meaning involved in the public representation of aspects of the homefront. A common thread running through them, however, is the agency of individuals to contribute and contest the cultural memory of the Second World War, be it the re-enactors or the members of the public that they speak to. For this reason re-enacting is an important source for historians interested in memory and the Second World War.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, it looks at Sandra Day's portrayal of a working class housewife as an example of a personal intervention into the gendered cultural memory of the Second World War, a public intervention that challenges and contests contemporary popular ideas of class and gender during the war.<sup>13</sup> This section argues that re-enacting is Sandra's way of commemorating the working class housewife by inserting a figure who she feels has been left out of the memory of the war effort. Thus her project addresses issues of absence and forgetting in the dominant narrative of the war. Sandra's efforts reveal how re-enacting can challenge and re-imagine mainstream cultural memories of the home front.

This chapter then turns to Simon Kerstin's Bevin Boy persona in order to consider the problem of meaning and cultural memory. Simon's decision to portray a

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce C Scates, 'Manufacturing Memory at Gallipoli', in Michael Keren and Holger H Herwig (eds.), *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* (London: McFarland 2009), p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Nokes and Pattinson, 'Introduction', pp. 6 – 7.

<sup>13</sup> Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 74.

Bevin Boy could be read as a text that ‘constitutes an unproblematic reflection of memory’.<sup>14</sup> For example, alongside the increased formal recognition of their contribution to the war effort by the state, Simon’s portrayal could be seen as evidence of how the Bevin Boy has become a more prominent part of the cultural memory of the Second World War in recent years.<sup>15</sup> Instead, this section uses the discussions between Simon and the public captured on film to explore the public reception to his re-enactment and demonstrate the multiple meanings, or the polysemous character, of historical representations.<sup>16</sup>

In both my film and research clips, we can see Simon’s interactions with members of the public and the varied responses the public have to his portrayal of a Bevin Boy, referencing subjects such as Margaret Thatcher, family history and the mining industry. This is an explicit demonstration of the different meanings produced in response to representations of the past and cautions against reading a text *as* memory.<sup>17</sup> Instead, by tracing the varied responses to Simon’s Bevin Boy this section illuminates the multidirectionality of memory, where a depiction of one aspect of the home front can be a trigger to remember other historical events and to create new and interesting connections between seemingly unconnected aspects of modern British history.

The final section focuses upon Simon Kerstin’s portrayal of a Second World War road builder and his accompanying diorama and examines why actions by individuals can fail to become part of the cultural memory. The failure of Simon’s road building display illustrates the role that two elements play in how people actively engage with the cultural memory of the war. Firstly, for personal memories to become part of the cultural memory of the war they need to engage with the broader social experience of the war such as family memories and war time memories, understood by Maurice Halbwachs as ‘social frames’.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, in order for an aspect of the

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<sup>14</sup> Susannah Radstone, ‘Reconceiving Binaries: the Limits of Memory’, *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> It was not until 1995 that the Bevin Boys were officially recognised for the contribution to the war effort and it was only in 2008 that they received a Veterans Badge. For information about the Bevin Boy see: Warwick Taylor, *The Forgotten Conscript: A History of the Bevin Boy* (Bishop Auckland: Pentland Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Bramall, ‘Memory, meaning and multidirectionality’, p. 202.

<sup>17</sup> Bramall, ‘Memory, meaning and multidirectionality’, pp. 202 - 203.

<sup>18</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Setting the framework’, in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge

homefront to become part of the cultural memory of the home front, personal memories need to fit into the wider popular discourses about the war.<sup>19</sup> As an instance of failure rather than success in terms of cultural memory, Simon's road building offers an interesting and unusual perspective on the processes involved in the cultural memory of the war.

Film as a research tool is particularly valuable at recording, capturing and revealing the contribution that *UK Homefront*'s re-enactment makes to the cultural memory of the home front. This chapter is an opportunity to bring both Sandra's and Simon's representations of the home front into a sustained dialogue with the scholarship on cultural memory that is more explicitly targeted at an academic audience. In particular, this chapter allows this thesis to engage with the ambiguous and abstract aspects of re-enacting and cultural memory that are ill suited to discussion with film, such as public responses to the Bevin Boy and Sandra's negotiation between the personal and the public discourses about the war. Finally, film-making is a research tool that allows the study of cultural memory to remain focused on specific, local, acts of commemoration.

### **1. Sandra Day as Working Class Housewife: Remembering the War**

There has been an increasing public value placed upon women's contribution in the Second World War, seen for instance in the recent memorial in London 2005, albeit not without its controversy for its focus on women's temporary roles in the auxiliary services and their ultimate return to the domestic.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, re-imagining and re-enacting the figure of the working-class housewife on the homefront has not been straightforward for Sandra. This section first examines how Sandra remembers the war before then turning to how re-enacting has been used to create a narrative about the war that reflects her distinctly working class and gendered reconstruction of the memory of the homefront. We can situate Sandra's attempt to seek out and 'live' the cultural image of the housewife and home (through clothing, activities, material culture, performance,

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University Press, 2000), p. 6; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 172 - 173.

<sup>19</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, 'Introduction', p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Corrina Peniston Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze: sorority and the memorial to The Women of World War II', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, p. 67-87.



and voice) as enacting cultural memory, rather than any personal memory, even though the image of the housewife in wartime is not the most dominant or pervasive image of the war visible in repeated cultural images.

Sandra Day was born in Liverpool in the 1950s and, partly because of her dyslexia she found History in school to be of little interest. In her adult life she worked as a nurse and looked after her children with her only connection to History through her husband Ian; ‘I was never brought up into History until I met Ian. I wouldn’t have thanked you for History until I met Ian’.<sup>21</sup> When she and Ian retired in the early 2000s they looked for a hobby to occupy their time and after trying antique fairs and visiting country houses they went to a Second World War re-enactment event held at Yorkshire Air Museum where they became interested in re-enacting. Initially, she was unsure what kind of character to portray before settling on that of a working class housewife: ‘When I first started I didn’t know what to go as. I went as a WVS [Women’s Voluntary Service] lady... but I didn’t have another WVS dress to wear while I was washing the other one so the pinny went on and it kind of stuck. The pinny took over from everything else, and the turban, and the slippers, and they took over completely’.<sup>22</sup>

As the film demonstrates, Sandra became consumed by her passion for the Second World War, and, in her words, she does not re-enact the home front so much as ‘live the forties’.<sup>23</sup> In many respects, her performance of a housewife illustrates the importance of the domestic on women’s life during the war, a largely forgotten or overlooked aspect of the homefront in the cultural memory of the war. In her work on British women’s experiences of modernization during the first half of the twentieth century, Judy Giles argues that prior to 1945 the home was an important site for women, despite the marginalisation of the domestic in both the historiography and public discourse in favour of an emphasis on women in the workplace.<sup>24</sup> Being a ‘good’ housewife was, Giles suggests, a significant way for women to ‘see themselves as active agents in the creation of a “better future” and a modern world through their work in the

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<sup>21</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 201.

<sup>23</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Home: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity, and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 160 – 161.

home'.<sup>25</sup> A key element of being a 'good' housewife was cleanliness; for example, there was a general reluctance amongst working class women to use washing machines because of a perception that they did not get clothes as white as possible, with 'whiteness' the visible sign of cleanliness, 'which was itself a mark of social status'.<sup>26</sup> Understood in these terms, Sandra's re-enacting, with its own emphasis on the home and cleanliness, is a significant intervention into the cultural memory of the war. It repositions the domestic and the housewife as important rather than marginal to experiences of women during the war.

In a more general sense of the war's presence on people's lives, the historian Geoff Eley is instructive. He suggests that, "'Remembering" World War Two requires no immediate experience of those years... This is especially true of the immediate post war generation (born between 1943-1945 and the mid-1950s), who grew up suffused in the effects of the war years but whose "memory" of them came entirely after the fact'.<sup>27</sup> Eley argues that British culture in the aftermath of the war was, at least up until the mid-1960s, 'pervaded by the war's presence'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly the work of Marianne Hirsch in Holocaust studies uses the term 'postmemory' to discuss how subsequent generations 'remember' the collective trauma of their parents and grandparents through the stories, images and behaviours that they grow up in.<sup>29</sup> Postmemory's connection to the past is thus 'not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation'.<sup>30</sup> Sandra's personal history echoes these ideas about memory expressed by Hirsch and Eley. In an interview, she describes her relationship to the war growing up:

Ben: What is your relationship to the war?

Sandra: My granny, the way I was brought up. I was brought up watching George Formby every Sunday with jelly and fruit and evaporated milk. That's how I was brought up. Oh and dripping butties. And that's how I was brought up. So, even

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<sup>25</sup> Giles, *The Parlour and the Home*, pp. 160 - 161.

<sup>26</sup> Giles, *The Parlour and the Home*, pp. 113 - 114, pp. 160 - 161.

<sup>27</sup> Eley, 'Finding the People's War', pp. 818 - 819.

<sup>28</sup> Eley, 'Finding the People's War', pp. 818 - 819.

<sup>29</sup> Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29:1 (Spring, 2008), p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'The Generation of Memory: Gender and the popular memory of the Second World War in Britain', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, p. 26.

though we were in the fifties we still had the forties stuff going on believe it or not.

In Liverpool they did anyway - it was either George Formby or Old Mother Riley.

Ben: So you grew up with the war in a way?

Sandra: Yes, most probably because it was still forties stuff at the top of the road and there was a hardware shop at the end of the road that sold the dolly blues and I used to love going up there. I was in my element.<sup>31</sup>

Despite being born in the 1950s, the war was still a prominent part of Sandra's childhood, which she experienced through both popular and material culture. Sandra's close, personal relationship to the war reflects a generation born after the war but clearly suffused in its effects.<sup>32</sup>

It was only recently that the war and the home front re-emerged as a prominent part of Sandra's life however. Historian Penny Summerfield argues that individual relationships to the past change 'during the life course', and suggests that 'imaginative engagement with the past mutates, conditioned by changing personal, political and cultural contexts'.<sup>33</sup> Sandra's relationship to the war illustrates this idea, and, despite the presence of the war in British culture as a child in the 1950s, the war became less prominent as her life progressed and other concerns such as motherhood and work became more significant to her. It was only when she retired and had time for a hobby based on the past that the significance of the war resurfaced in her life with greater personal meaning than it had before. It is this reflective position found later in life, entwined with the richness of a pervasive cultural memory about the Second World War in Britain, that reveal how even small acts of remembering are flexible and shift in accordance with changing experiences and their social and cultural context.

Notably, how Sandra has chosen to re-enact the war is shaped by her own experiences as well as the popular public discourses that are part of the cultural memory of the war. While Sandra remembers the popular values of 'the People's War', such as community spirit and the idea of everyone being 'in it together', she also chooses to remember the personal and the material that she encountered as a child growing up with her grandmother who was of the war generation. Yet, Sandra does not play a child – she plays an adult woman, a mother, and housewife. How she transposes memories of her

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<sup>31</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Eley, 'Finding the People's War', p. 818.

<sup>33</sup> Summerfield, 'The Generation of Memory', p. 40.

grandmother is part of this constructing process and demonstrates the role that familial involvement can have on how people remember the war.<sup>34</sup> To be sure, Sandra remembers the war through the material culture of her childhood, in particular the ‘dolly blues’, an item that recurs throughout her re-enactments shown in the film.<sup>35</sup> Of equal importance is her close relationship to her grandmother who looked after her and whose washing items she takes to re-enactment events. In an interview at the beginning of the film she explains her decision to re-enact as a housewife:

Sandra: Why I decided on the housewife was I was brought up by grandmother in Liverpool and she was a proper homely granny with all the forties stuff around her. She did the washing and the mangling and the dolly tub and I just carried on from where she left off.<sup>36</sup>

Sandra closely entwines the personal and material in how she remembers the war and in a separate interview she revealed that, ‘we started it up because we had all my stuff from my grandma so I displayed all her household stuff’.<sup>37</sup> Sandra offers an example of how people can remember a historical event that they have no first-hand experience of. Importantly, her testimony also demonstrates that in the process of making sense of the past people draw upon a combination of popular public discourses about historical events as well as personally significant moments and interests.

Given the recent prominence of the Second World War in her life, re-enacting can be seen to play a significant role in how Sandra chooses to remember the war, specifically how she composes her distinctly domestic memory of the war. The concept of ‘composure’ refers to ‘the process by which subjectivities are constructed in life-story telling’, and the term has a double meaning. Graham Dawson suggests that, ‘Composure occurs when a teller composes a story about him- or herself, so here composure refers to the composition of the narrative. It also refers to the way in which a narrator seeks a sense of “composure” from constituting themselves as the subject of their story’.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> Summerfield, ‘The Generation of Memory’, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> The dolly blues were a brand of whitening agent used in washing in the period. They were manufactured by William Edge and Sons in Britain until the 1960s.

<sup>36</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 02.09 - 02.28.

<sup>37</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure’, p. 69; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 23 - 25; Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia’,

relationship of composure to cultural representations is that public discourses are inevitably drawn upon in the composition of a story about the self. In addition to public discourses, however Penny Summerfield notes the importance of intergenerational relationships to processes of composure. She argues that gender and public discourse shape the transmission of familial memories and experiences divergent from the dominant public discourses around male military experiences can often result in silences and problems with composure.<sup>39</sup>

As well as composure however there is also ‘discomposure’. Summerfield uses the term discomposure where problems of composure are the result of ‘an uncomprehending or unsympathetic audience or a particular terrain of memory’ that produces ‘personal disequilibrium, manifest in confusion, anger, self-contradiction, discomfort and difficulties of sustaining narratives’.<sup>40</sup> The combination of interviews with Sandra and the filmed observations of her re-enacting are in this respect illuminating as it is possible to use these two processes to reveal both her discomposure and composure, involving public discourses and personal, familial discourses.

In an interview that I conducted during my fieldwork and which does not appear in the film, I asked Sandra why it was important to remember washing within the context of the war. Sandra struggled to compose a coherent narrative of the war that accounts for the importance of her grandmother’s role as the housewife to the war effort. Whilst I found in editing that her confused and ambiguous response made it unsuitable for inclusion in the film,<sup>41</sup> it is useful to examine this conversation in detail as Sandra’s

in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader: third edition* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 344 – 345.

<sup>39</sup> Summerfield, ‘The Generation of Memory’, pp. 28 - 30.

<sup>40</sup> Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure’, pp. 69 – 70.

<sup>41</sup> Chapter One discusses the editorial decisions about what to include in the accompanying film and what to discuss in prose. However, this instance offers an example of how a project that uses film-making as a research tool can benefit from the use of both prose and film to represent research. Rather than lose useful source material because it falls outside of the scope of a research film, the material can instead contribute to more abstract discussions in the accompanying prose that benefit from a dialogue with wider scholarship. In this instance, Sandra’s ambiguous and confused response is revealing when analysed in terms of cultural memory and the composure of one’s life-story. For a further discussion of editing choices in projects that use film-making as a research tool see: Paul Henley, ‘Putting film to work: Observational cinema as practical ethnography’, in Sarah Pink, Laszlo Kurti and Ana Isabel Afonso (eds.), *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography* (London, 2004), pp. 122 - 124.

testimony reveals the problem that she has in composing a clear narrative about washing and the war:

Ben: Why is it important to remember washing during the war?

Sandra: I don't know. I suppose it's how I've been brought up, going to the washhouse since I was seven, being shown how to do a wash. Two double sheets of washing, dragging them up the hill every night to the washhouse. That was me every night of the week. A push chair for one of them, the two bundles on top of each other and I'd push them up to the wash house. If it wasn't my mother's it was my aunt's, if it wasn't my aunt's it would be my grandma, if it wasn't my grandma it would be the neighbours, and I loved every minute of it. I love my washing. I'd wash all day me if you let me, if I could get a job in a laundrette or washhouse that'd be my dream come true

Ben: Why is it important when we think about washing?

Sandra: It's important to let people see how hard women worked, and not just the washing, I mean a family of six used to take up to eight hours to do the washing, these washing machines I call them a lazy form of washing, the proper way is to get your hands dirty with the dolly tub. I do the forties; I do the washing for people to understand what it was like for women to do. You just imagine drops are falling and you'd have to drag it all into the kitchen. Because you've got to have clean clothes, you can't not do without clean clothes! It's like food, you can't do without that, and you've got to have clean clothes!<sup>42</sup>

Sandra initially struggles to explain the importance of washing to the war and she instead describes her own personal experiences of washing as a child.<sup>43</sup> It is only after the second prompt that Sandra eventually shifts her answer away from washing as an activity and relates it to the war by putting washing into the context of an air raid ('just imagine drops are falling and you'd have to drag it all into the kitchen'). In order to incorporate washing into a meaningful narrative of the wartime experience Sandra uses one of the popular discourses about the civilian experience of the war – air raids. Even then however she struggles to sustain this narrative and angrily finishes by claiming clean washing as a necessity.

Sandra's response to why washing is significant to the history of the homefront demonstrates the sense of discomposure she encounters when she has to verbally

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<sup>42</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', pp. 69 – 70.

articulate the meanings behind her chosen subject for re-enacting.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the difficulty that Sandra has composing a narrative about washing and the war is in marked contrast with the ease with which she recounts her childhood experience with washing. Talking about her own experience, Sandra creates a coherent narrative and expresses the significance that it has both had and currently has in her life.

The difficulty that Sandra has in making her personal experiences illustrates the gendered hierarchy of memory. Using Mass Observation, oral history, and the BBC ‘People’s War’ website both Summerfield and Noakes have demonstrated that women often struggle to account for their experiences during the war in the same authoritative tone that men use, despite the common idea of the ‘people’s war’.<sup>45</sup> As Summerfield points out, women whose experiences deviate from these narratives are regularly omitted from public accounts of the war and women can find it hard to ‘compose their accounts’ of the war.<sup>46</sup> Sandra’s problem with articulating why the housewife and washing are important to the war suggests that she has a similar problem finding public accounts of the war to use as a framework for remembering the war.

The complications Sandra faces in her focus on the working-class housewife can however be explained by more than just the dominance of masculine experiences of the war in public discourses about the war. The cultural memory of the war tends to focus on ‘two separate but interwoven groups: memories which emphasize the experiences of the combatant man and those which fit within the continuing popular memory of the ‘people’s war’’.<sup>47</sup> Through acts of public commemoration, such as the unveiling of a memorial to ‘The Women of World War II’ in Whitehall in 2005 and the unveiling in 2016 of a statue in Sheffield to the women who worked in the steel industry, the contribution of women to the war effort has become a significant part of the cultural

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<sup>44</sup> Penny Tinkler, ‘“When I was a Girl...”: Women Talking about Their Girlhood Photo Collections’, in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 47 – 48.

<sup>45</sup> Lucy Noakes, ‘The BBC’s “People’s War” Website’, in Michael Keren and Holger H Herwig (eds.), *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* (London: McFarland, 2009), pp. 146 - 147.

<sup>46</sup> Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure’, p. 74.

<sup>47</sup> Noakes, ‘The BBC’s “People’s War” Website’, p. 138.

memory of the war.<sup>48</sup> How the role of women in the war is remembered is far from homogenous however and Corinna Peniston-Bird notes that there is a tension between the contribution of women in civilian work and those in auxiliary roles, with servicewomen in particular placing a greater emphasis on their own contribution to the war.<sup>49</sup> As Peniston-Bird argues, women's contribution to the war effort continues 'to be valued, in ascending order of status, on a spectrum defined at one end by... overt and obvious connection to the war effort'.<sup>50</sup> For Sandra, despite the increasing appreciation of the role women played in the war, she believes that the role of the housewife remains subordinate to women's work that directly contributed to the war effort, which in turn is subordinate to women in auxiliary roles.

This problem of composing memories that sit outside of the public discourse on the Second World War is also evident in her re-enacting. A discussion I had with Sandra about when she first started re-enacting makes this particularly clear. Prior to setting up *UK Homefront*, she joined a military group and spoke to the organiser about what she wanted to do:

Sandra: I said 'I want to do more like a home front display', and he said 'It'll never come off the ground, everyone likes the military and the battles'... not a lot of people hear about the home front they mostly hear about the military, battles and stuff like that, they don't hear about the home front. When I first started there was no one wearing pinnies or turbans or dinky curlers.<sup>51</sup>

Not only did her desire to commemorate the contribution of the housewife to the home front challenge other re-enactors' expectations of how women can re-enact, but it also points to the absence of a popular cultural framework for Sandra to draw on in order to insert a new character into the standard and accepted characterizations within war-related re-enactment practice. Her working class housewife struggles to fit within the existing discourses about the war and one can understand her decision to use domestic displays and to provide direct talks with the public as a response to this absence.

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<sup>48</sup> Peniston-Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze', pp. 67 - 88; <http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/unveiled-sheffield-s-brave-women-of-steel-honoured-with-statue-1-7969593> accessed 1 July 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Peniston-Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze', pp. 74 - 76.

<sup>50</sup> Peniston-Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze', p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.



Sandra's displays and talks with the public further reveal the tension between the dominant cultural narratives of the war and her personal memories. While Summerfield's interviews with women show that they submerged their wartime contributions under men's, by contrast Sandra inserts the housewife into the dominant 'myth of the people's war', thus rescuing her from historical obscurity as well as the gender order that shapes memory work. Angus Calder describes this as 'the sense that rich and poor, civilians and fighters were "all in it together", that privilege was or should be in abeyance and that even conscripted effort had a voluntary character'.<sup>52</sup> At events Sandra's housewife is seen by the public alongside many other more typical examples from the home front like the ARP warden and the Women's Land Army, part of the visual wartime tapestry created by the re-enactors and worthy of attention by the public. Furthermore, in interviews, discussions with the public and her wash-day displays Sandra subscribes to and repeats this vision of the 'people's war'. For example, during her talk at Eden Camp shown in the film she tells her audience about the role that the WVS played in making sure families in the community that had been bombed had clean clothes. She discusses rationing and, referencing *The King's Speech* (Hooper, 2010), describes how even the Queen Mother had to do her bit for the war effort by marking her bath to six inches and rationing her use of water.<sup>53</sup> And in an interview she identified a supposed sense of community found during the war as part of what attracted her to the period.<sup>54</sup>

Her re-enacting however contests and challenges this notion of the 'people's war' as often as it confirms it. During her talks about washing Sandra reveals the role that the WVS played in providing clean washing for the community. However, she will then mention that part way through the war the company Lever Brothers took over responsibility for this service from the WVS and started to charge people for what was once a free service, undermining the notion of everyone being in it together. Additionally, her remarks about the Queen Mother in *The King's Speech* shown in the accompanying film criticise her for thinking that she was different to everyone else.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Angus Calder, 'Britain's good war?', *History Today*, vol 45, 5, May, (1995), p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 35.09 - 35.52.

<sup>54</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

<sup>55</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 35.09 - 35.52.

Sandra also presents a distinctly working class account of the housewife; which she believes is underrepresented account in the contemporary cultural memory of the war.

This frustration with contemporary depictions of the past is evident in two key scenes in the film. Firstly there is the scene of Sandra walking around the rooms at Brodsworth Hall; an English Heritage run county home built in the 1860s. In this scene Sandra responds to the heritage on display, criticising the cleanliness of the rooms and revealing her frustration at the absence of working class and women's history from the 'la de da bloody parlours' on display in the Hall. The scene ends with Sandra off to find the servants quarters where she feels most at home, 'where I belong' as she puts it.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst this scene reflects her general sense that 'her' story, the history of women and the working class, is missing from popular heritage, the film ends with a scene where she articulates her frustration at this state of affairs, specifically with regards the Second World War. The following conversation is from this scene in the film:

Sandra: Women did keep the country going; if it wasn't for the women in this country. But what upsets me and really annoys me is that there is no memorial for the women of this country, what they did in the war. Or for civilian, or for homefront. There's one for land army and for the men but there's none for home front...Yeah, the only way I can get it across is re-enacting it. The only way I can get the working class women across, is doing what I'm doing.<sup>57</sup>

Re-enacting is Sandra's attempt to fashion a narrative that makes the contribution of the housewife part of the existing cultural discourse on the war. More importantly, re-enacting is the only way that Sandra feels that she can make this contribution part of the public discourse. Unable to commemorate the contribution of working-class women through more traditional means like a war memorial, re-enacting provides Sandra with the agency to make public her memory of the war and an opportunity for her to bring the contribution of civilians to public attention and contest the dominant narratives of the male wartime experience. In her view 'you'll always remember the military side, you'll always remember Churchill, you won't remember the home front' and re-enacting a working class housewife allows her to challenge this narrative of the war and commemorate the civilian contribution.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 2.53 - 3.58.

<sup>57</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 47.43 - 48.12.

<sup>58</sup> Sandra Day, Interview, June 2015.

Jay Winter suggests that commemoration is ‘an act rising out of a conviction, shared by a broad community, that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message. Sites of memory materialize that message’.<sup>59</sup> Re-enactment events are sites of memory where largely anyone can argue over representations of the past, such as the casual re-enactor, a member of the public or the most serious re-enactor. Consequently re-enactment events represent a wide range of memories and are arguably more diverse than at traditional sites like monuments or museums.<sup>60</sup> Sandra’s ability to personally commemorate the civilians of the Second World, especially the working class women who are most important to her, at re-enactment events illustrates this idea.

Finally, the difference between Sandra’s interview testimony and her practice at re-enactment events suggests that acts of composure can be practical - the outcome of actions - as well as occur through oral and textual processes such as interviews or the writing of autobiographies. Matt Houlbrook touches on this idea in his exploration of why women read fiction. He suggests that the process of reading offered women ‘one resource through which to engage in the messy work of negotiating emotional and psychological conflict, composing an acceptable sense of self and forging a better life’.<sup>61</sup> What the case of Sandra demonstrates is that composure can also occur through re-enacting, a practice that allows her to negotiate between personal experiences and public discourses.

Furthermore, the relative sophistication and confidence with which Sandra uses re-enacting for gaining composure is in contrast with her interview testimony which is often marked by evidence of discomposure. If this research project had focused on traditional methods of research Sandra’s practical act of composure may have been overlooked or marginalised by a focus on her interview testimony. Additionally, Sandra is motivated to re-enact by her own autobiographical impulse, again in contrast to the

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<sup>59</sup> Jay Winter, ‘Sites of Memory’, pp. 312 - 313.

<sup>60</sup> In many respects, re-enactment events are similar to websites as sites of memory as both are sites where there is only a very limited authorial voice and there is considerable scope for individuals to freely contribute to the cultural memory of the war. See: Noakes, ‘War on the Web’, pp. 48 - 49.

<sup>61</sup> Matt Houlbrook, “‘A Pin to See the Peepshow’”: Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson’s Letters, 1921 - 1922’ *Past and Present*, no. 207 (May 2010), p. 249.

interview process which I typically initiated during filming.<sup>62</sup> Thus, observational film-making was a tool that enabled me to fruitfully research Sandra's chosen means of negotiating her own sense of self and her relationship to the war. In this sense, film-making offers historians a research tool for observing, recording, and communicating acts of composure that are meaningful and self-motivated and yet intangible or impermanent.

One can therefore understand Sandra's re-enactment practice as a profound personal commitment to making sense of her relationship to the war, through the personal memory of her grandmother, while also composing her sense of her own self as a working-class woman in the twenty-first century. The figure of the housewife is identified as figure of forgetting, but one that Sandra deems worthy of popular cultural memory. To that extent, Sandra is attempting to redress an absence that has a deeper meaning for her beyond representation. In the next section, I discuss another re-enactor, Simon Kerstin, who performs the role of the 'Bevin Boy', a figure that has had a much more enduring popular cultural memory than the housewife in Britain. This comparison also lies at the heart of the film's structure.

## **2. Simon Kerstin: The Bevin Boy and Multidirectional Memory**

This section uses Simon Kerstin's depiction of a Bevin Boy to explore the meanings that his public portrayal of this wartime occupation generates and to examine what this can tell us about Britain's cultural memory of the Second World War.<sup>63</sup> This section builds on Rebecca Bramall's work on the contemporary public discourse in Britain on austerity in which she argues that in the scholarship on cultural memory, '[t]here is a widespread assumption that a media text that *depicts* the past is definitely 'about' the past; that its meaning is secured precisely by the fact that it depicts a 'meaningful' event in the past' and, she suggests, 'the question of meaning is often avoided altogether in contemporary research on cultural memory.'<sup>64</sup> Bramall illustrates this point with the many contemporary references to historical austerity in relation to the financial crisis, which

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<sup>62</sup> Alistair Thomson, 'Life Stories and Historical Analysis', in in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (eds), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 104 - 105.

<sup>63</sup> Bramall, 'Memory, meaning and multidirectionality', p. 202.

<sup>64</sup> Bramall, 'Memory, meaning and multidirectionality', p. 202.

she argues are rarely intended as commemorative or educative about the past, but are in fact appropriated for discussion of modern issues, such as climate change. Therefore, rather than treat Simon's representation of a Bevin Boy as a text to be read *as* memory, this section uses the public reaction to Simon's portrayal captured on film during my fieldwork in order to understand the range of meanings that his re-enactment generates.

In order to read Simon's re-enacting as more than just a representation of the Bevin Boy in the Second World War, this section uses a multidirectional model of memory to understand how Simon's re-enacting interacts with private and public memories in surprising ways. Michael Rothberg proposed this model of memory in his work on the holocaust and urges that we 'consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative'. He argues that, 'one cannot know in advance how the articulation of a memory will function; nor can one even be sure that it will function only in one way'.<sup>65</sup> Rothberg suggests that 'pursuing memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction'.<sup>66</sup> Simon's re-enacting and the filming process used in this thesis offered an opportunity to both observe and capture this process in action. This section uses the discussions between Simon Kerstin as a Bevin Boy and members of the public to illustrate the polysemy of 'historical' representations and demonstrate how "'different" pasts reverberate to different effect in different moments of the present'.<sup>67</sup>

Simon portrays the Bevin Boy for a number of reasons. Growing up in Yorkshire, he was acutely aware of the mining industry in Britain and had the industry still been going when he started work he would have more than likely ended up employed in the mining industry. His grandfather who was a railwayman, a reserved occupation during the war, also influences him and this inspired him to re-enact the Bevin Boy, which he believes is a similarly marginalised wartime occupation. He

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<sup>65</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, pp. 3 - 5.

<sup>67</sup> Bramall, 'Memory, meaning and multidirectionality', pp. 202 - 203; Bill Schwarz, 'Afterword: "strolling spectators" and "practical Londoners" – remembering the imperial past', in Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo (eds.), *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'* (London: Routledge), p. 221.

suggests that '[my grandfather is] probably why I do the Bevin Boy... the Bevin Boy came about because the story wasn't getting told'. Simon is extremely conscious that it has only been relatively recently that their contribution to the war effort has been officially recognised and portraying a Bevin Boy is a way for him to pay tribute to the 'bravery and sacrifice' of those men who were in reserved occupations.<sup>68</sup> The absence of the Bevin Boy from the re-enactment circuit and his own personal pleasure at presenting something 'a bit different' to the public also drives his desire to do the Bevin Boy.<sup>69</sup> Influenced by his personal experiences, his family history and his own interests, Simon has developed a display that he uses to commemorate the Bevin Boy and educate the public at different events around the north of England and Wales.

It is when Simon meets with and talks to members of the public however that it becomes evident that the depiction of the past in the public sphere - in this case the Bevin Boys' - does not necessarily guarantee meaning. Between 2013 and 2015 Simon portrayed a Bevin Boy at an event at Colwyn Bay in North Wales and his interactions with the public at this event offers an illustration of this idea. Dressed as a Bevin Boy, Simon is stood by his display of 1940s mining equipment. On the display there are panels of text for the public to read, offering a brief overview of how mining works but focusing mainly upon the history of the Bevin Boys. It explains the rationale for their creation during the war, the process of balloting to choose men, their wartime work, and then how society treated them after the war. Alongside this explanatory text, there is an array of wartime mining equipment, from shovels and picks to a replica canary cage. Over the course of these two-day events, Simon will speak to a large number of interested people attracted by his display and by his own striking appearance as a Bevin Boy.<sup>70</sup>

His discussions with the public are about the history of the Bevin Boy and the Second World War but they often develop in unexpected and unpredictable ways. The following exchange is between Simon and a member of the public who is taking a photograph of him. Though it did not appear in the film as it falls outside the film's primary focus on why Simon re-enacts and his depiction of a road builder, it is

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<sup>68</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Research Clip, *Simon Kerstin at Colwyn Bay, 2015*, <https://filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/>

appropriate to discuss it here as it gives a flavour of the discussions that occur at a re-enactment event and illustrates their often circuitous meaning:

Photographer: (Finishing taking photos) Tell me about yourself.

Simon: I'm the collier in charge of Bevin Boys so um, just really to tell the story of the Bevin Boys.

Photographer: So where are you based then?

Simon: I'm uh, I'm, the group are from all over the country.

Photographer: All over the country.

Simon: Myself, I'm from West Yorkshire, um, I lived in Pontefract for a while which was a, well a mining town more than a mining village, a mining town.

Photographer: I'm a Sheffielder so not that far away.

Simon: No, no a lot of the group is from that area - Sheffield.

Photographer: Is it the Hatfield Colliery? It's still going at the moment isn't it?

Simon: Oh yeah, I know that.

Photographer: Are there talks about it packing up?

Simon: Well, with all these pits, yeah.

Photographer: One of the last ones.

Simon: Major coal seams are down sort of black country, there's very little in the country any more.

Photographer: I mean I can remember the Orgreave troubles.

Simon: Ah.

Photographer: Well, those were bad days. So, what is the Bevin Boys scheme then?

Simon: Well, when the Second World War broke out 30,000 of the miners volunteered to go into the army so we left a shortfall, and with 4 million ton of coal we needed to replace those guys. So, the first part of the Bevin Boy scheme was to try and bring the ex-colliers who were serving back into the industry. The vast majority didn't want to come back um, so it comes down to forcing people to go down the mine via ballot.

Photographer: I didn't know that.

Simon: So they draw a number out of a hat every fortnight, or two, in some cases two numbers, in some cases one number, and they'd draw it out a hat and whatever number your service number ended in, if it ended in the same number that had been picked out the hat that fortnight, you were down the mines.

Photographer: I take that was, local area, people from the local area drafted in from anywhere?

Smon: No drafted in from anywhere.

Photographer: (To a woman also looking at the display) Your granddad, was he a Bevin Boy?

Women: Yes, he's only just got his badge.

Simon: Oh right, well, they only just officially recognised them in the nineties.

Photographer: What was your granddad's memory? Did he hate it?

Women: No.

Simon: Was he one of the ones that enjoyed it?

Women: He enjoyed it. He tells us stories of coming back and washing.

Her Partner: Tide marks up here! (he points to his elbows)

Simon: You get them up here too (lifts up helmet). Very good.<sup>71</sup>

The transcript of this discussion suggests a number of things about the cultural memory of the war. The enthusiasm of the public in their discussion with Simon, along with his own decision to publicly commemorate the Bevin Boys through re-enacting, can be understood as part of an ongoing move by the Bevin Boys from the margins to the centre of the cultural memory of the war which largely began with their official recognition in 1998 when the Bevin Boys first marched on Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph in London.<sup>72</sup> The discussion also identifies the anger felt by Bevin Boys about their treatment by the government, both at the time and subsequently, and suggests that Simon's re-enacting, his act of commemoration, is playing a role in making their contribution to the war a more prominent part of the cultural memory of the war.

More persuasively however this discussion reflects Rothberg's notion of the 'ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing' of memory. The Bevin Boy triggers discussions about different Bevin Boys experiences (the woman's grandfather challenging Simon's idea of the Bevin Boys hating mining), the relative treatment of servicemen and men on the homefront, the contemporary mining industry in Britain, and the Miners' Strike in 1984 ('the Orgreave troubles'). So whilst one can read Simon's re-enacting as indicative of the increasingly prominent position that the Bevin Boys occupy in the cultural memory of the war, it is important to recognise that his re-enacting actually generates many different discussions with people which can be about the

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<sup>71</sup> For a clip of the full discussion see: <https://filmingthepast.com/simon-kerstin-at-colwyn-bay-2015/>

<sup>72</sup> Penniston-Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze', p. 70, p. 79.



mining industry, recent history and family history, *as well as* about the Bevin Boys. Far from a stable text, Simon's re-enactment reveals how the articulation of memory can often be unexpected and unplanned.

During the course of my fieldwork Simon was candid about the unexpected nature of his re-enacting.

Ben: Do you mind that it's not always about the Second World War?

Simon: Well you just engage with people whatever they want to talk about. Okay, my spread is about the Second World War but it doesn't always have to be. You just talk to the people that ask you questions, you don't turn round and say, 'sorry mate your question isn't about the Second World War I'm not going to answer that'. You just do your best to engage with it the way you can.

Ben: Do you think that's how memory works? People come round, they see these things and they think about the Second World War but...

Simon: No, it's a bit of a blurred line. They look at things, and it reminds them of modern things, you talk to somebody and you try and steer them backwards through time. There was a miner in earlier and he said, 'I don't remember any of this stuff'. And I said, 'You pretty much won't, all of this is before your time'. And then you steer the conversation back towards the forties.<sup>73</sup>

With Simon's re-enacting the 'modern things' that most frequently came up are the politics involved in mining and in particular the decision taken by the British government to close the mines in the 1970s and 1980s. Simon found that, 'I do I get a lot of political comment about that, nothing to do with the war, to do with recent history'.<sup>74</sup> Whilst he focuses on discussing the Bevin Boy in his interactions with the public, he finds that 'you can't talk about modern mining without pits closing... sometimes you're guided that way with the conversation'.<sup>75</sup> Rather than just being about the home front, Simon's portrayal of a Bevin Boy - which can be considered, in Rothberg's terms, an 'articulation of a memory'<sup>76</sup> - is subject to ongoing negotiations over Thatcherism, labour relations, the people's war and the contribution of the Bevin Boys to the success of the war effort.

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<sup>73</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>76</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 4.

What Simon's public re-enacting makes clear is that the cultural memory of Second World War can be conceived as operating on a 'blurred line' where different aspects of the past, both personal and public, come together to generate new meanings and new understandings of the war. Whereas Geoff Eley describes a process of 'powerful suturing of the Depression and the Second World War into a discourse of democracy and public good' that lasted into the 1960s and 1970s before being challenged and overturned by Thatcherism and Churchillian rhetoric post 1980, the public discourses around Simon's re-enactment of a Bevin Boy suggests that the meaning of the war is still contested in the public sphere.<sup>77</sup> Rather than understood through Churchillian rhetoric, the Bevin Boy served as a trigger for the public at Colwyn Bay to remember their parents and grandparents, the mining communities that used to exist and that they belonged to, and to create links between the People's War, Thatcherism and contemporary society. Uncovering memory's multidirectionality uncovers the unpredictable and productive nature of memory and demonstrates that, far from being fixed, the meanings behind the cultural memory of the war are in a continual ongoing state of flux and negotiation.

### 3.3 Simon Kerstin: Road Up and Marginal Memories

Simon Kerstin's portrayal of a road builder however demonstrates how personal memories can fail to generate meaning in the public sphere. As Noakes suggests:

representations of the past that are created in the public sphere, on the public stage, that do not accord with the memories of enough of that public, will find it difficult to reach a wide audience. They need to have resonance with people's recollections, to fit, to 'ring true', in order to be considered authentic.<sup>78</sup>

This section uses Simon's experiences at the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port in October 2014 - shown in the research film - to explore this idea.<sup>79</sup> This section offers some insights into how and why the personal and private can fail to connect with an audience and become part of the wider public discourse on the Second World War.

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<sup>77</sup> Geoff Eley, 'Forward', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, p. xviii.

<sup>78</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, 'Introduction', p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 26.10 - 33.15, 42.49 - 46.28.

Simon is a civil engineer and he wanted to re-enact a wartime occupation that had a connection to his current work. This inspired him to research road building during the war and, using photos from the period, he made his display. For Simon there is a simple rationale behind his decision to re-enact as a road builder; not only is it a role that someone his age would have done but during the war there was a great deal of ongoing road building, repairing bomb damage and improving the infrastructure necessary for the movement of troops and supplies around the country.<sup>80</sup> Road building was an area of personal interest for Simon, suitable for re-enacting and an aspect of the war that he believed would be of interest to his audience at re-enactment events.

The film covers the lack of public response to this re-enactment in some detail, and shows Simon setting up his wartime road building display for a two-day event at the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port. Despite his considerable efforts the majority of people that stopped and spoke to Simon were confused about the aim of his display, asking him ‘where the bomb is?’<sup>81</sup> The only people that knew what he was doing were members of the public old enough to remember road building in 1940s and 1950s.

The memories that were shared by these members of the public and Simon were however concentrated upon personal memories divorced from the Second World War. For example, after getting over his initial confusion about the display, one visitor in his seventies shared his memories of his father stealing one of the road builder lamps to put in the outside toilet to stop it heating over.<sup>82</sup> Another man that remembered the road up was more interested in talking to Simon about the changes to the local area rather than road repairs.<sup>83</sup> Rather than an opportunity to discuss the many innovations in road works ushered in by the war, such as the widespread use of cat’s eyes and road markings to help with blackouts,<sup>84</sup> Simon explained the meaning of his display to confused people.

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<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of road building and infrastructure improvements during the war see: Peter Merriman, *Driving spaces: a cultural-historical geography of England's M1 motorway* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 43 - 48, 56 - 59. See also: *Re-enacting the Second World War*, 26.10 - 33.15, 42.49 - 46.28.

<sup>81</sup> Visitor, Ellesmere Port, October 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Visitor, Ellesmere Port, October 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Visitor, Ellesmere Port, October 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Merriman, *Driving spaces*, pp. 43 - 48.

If we put to one side the technical aspects of his display and the relationship with the public that this creates (specifically the spatial arrangement of the display discussed in the previous chapter) what can this apparent failure tell us about the workings of memory and the cultural memory of the Second World War? Firstly, the response to Simon's display demonstrates the importance of framing to cultural memory. The idea of framing was suggested by Maurice Halbwachs who identified the importance of 'social framing' to collective memory. He argued that social frames support and define both collective memory and the memories of individuals. He insisted that no memory is possible outside of shared social frames and that the shifting or crumbling of these frames induces changes in personal memory and even forgetting. Halbwachs argues that:

We can remember the past only on condition of retrieving the position of past events that interest us from the frameworks of collective memory. A recollection is the richer when it reappears at the junction of a greater number of these frameworks, which in effect intersect each other and overlap in part. Forgetting is explained by the disappearance of these frameworks or of a part of them.<sup>85</sup>

With this idea of social frameworks, we can understand the problems that Simon encountered with the public. For the majority of visitors to his display the relevant frameworks required to make sense of what he was re-enacting were absent. Only those members of the public old enough to have seen roadworks in the 1940s and 1950s could understand his display; Simon found that, 'some of the older visitors, they used to be kids at the time. [They said] I remember this, I remember the night watchmen chasing me off because I was trying to steal the lamps'.<sup>86</sup> Even these individuals however had no framework that could make a connection between the war and road building and so could only understand his display in terms of their own childhood experiences.

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<sup>85</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, pp. 172 -173.

<sup>86</sup> Simon Kerstin, Interview, October 2014.



**Figure 3.1: Simon Kerstin's *Road Up* Display, National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port, 25 October 2014. Source: Ben Knowles, 2014.**



**Figure 3.2: Bomb from an air raid (middle right of image), National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port, 25 October 2014. Source: Ben Knowles, 2014.**





**Figure 3.3: Close up of bomb from an air raid, National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port, 25 October 2014. Source: Ben Knowles, 2014.**

Secondly, the desire by the public to ‘know where the bomb is?’ demonstrates the importance of public discourse in understanding depictions of the past and incorporating them into cultural memory. At 1940s re-enactment events there are typically a number of re-enactors who portray Air Raid Protection wardens and there are often scenarios about the Blitz. For example, at the same event a scenario took place on both days where ARP wardens dealt with an unexploded bomb found in the road after an air raid (see figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 for a comparison of the displays). When the public encountered Simon’s display about road building, they lacked the frameworks necessary to make sense of it and instead drew upon popular discourses about the war, in this instance the Blitz.<sup>87</sup> Simon and I discussed this occurrence in a later interview:

Ben: Do you think people can understand it [the Road UP display]? People that saw it wanted to know where the bomb was. Do people expect certain things?

Simon: I’d driven it away from it being a bomb, repairing bomb damage, because you see that quite a bit with the ARP and I wanted something away from that. It did frustrate me that people asked ‘where was the bomb’. I had the big tripod and winch and what have you. That was there really to lift stuff out of the hole rather

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<sup>87</sup> Noakes, ‘War on the Web’, p. 51 – 52.

than to sort a bomb out. I think at a 1940s event people are almost expecting something to do with ordinance, or guns, people want to see a rifle or a gun, I think that was probably a miscalculation on my part. I've thought about having a bomb but I'm trying to get away from that, because I want it to be different.<sup>88</sup>

Simon's display lacks the necessary narrative about the war that his audience expect and understand and instead they try to make sense of it through the Blitz. The public reaction to his display reveals how personal representations of the war can be subsumed and obscured by other, more popular discourses about the war, particularly if it is unclear how these personal representations fit into the cultural memory of the war. In order for Simon to successfully present a display to the public that revealed an unusual aspect of the homefront he needed to make road building's connection to the public discourses about the war both more explicit and more important.

During a subsequent interview, Simon spoke about his disappointment at the public reaction to his display:

Simon: It does seem to fall outside what you would come to associate with the war. Actually, the more I've looked into it the more developments came about because of the war. Cat's eyes were about since the 30s but didn't start getting much use until war and the blackouts; same with painting road markings. Road markings, whilst they were around, didn't really come into use until the war. They used to paint junctions but with only having small dim lights on the cars they put road markings up the middle so people could see where the roads went. So, a lot of developments are actually associated with road building during the war but again people don't see that because it's not a bomb going off, it's overlooked and I don't know if I can do enough to inspire someone. It inspired me because of my background but I don't know if I can inspire other people.<sup>89</sup>

Simon's experience reveals the process of shifting or refining at sites of memory, in which particular memories – those who dominate the current constructions of national identity such as the Blitz – take precedence over other, more difficult memories like his road building.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Simon's experience suggests that in order for an aspect of the war to move from the margins to the centre of the cultural memory it needs to fit

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<sup>88</sup> Simon, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Simon, Interview, March 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History. Les lieux de memoires', *Representations*, 26, (1989), pp. 7 - 25.

within existing discourses about the war; it needs to have some resonant meaning with the public. If an aspect of the home front is too removed from the popular cultural memory of the war it lacks the purchase to be able to move into wider discussions.

Simon's comments also indicate the role that power relations play in cultural memory. As Noakes suggests, power relations 'shape the social world in which memories circulate and identities are formed' and this can partly explain the problems that Simon encounters in his road building display.<sup>91</sup> Absent from representations of the war in museums, textbooks, exhibitions, or government-approved commemorative acts, Simon's alternative memory of road building is effectively submerged by discourses of the Blitz. Furthermore, as an individual re-enactor Simon has only limited cultural capital with which to inspire greater interest in this aspect of the homefront and increase its prominence in the cultural memory of the war. Simon's road building offers a caution against reading cultural memory as entirely flexible or fluid and reminds the historian that power structures play a significant role in shaping cultural memory.

While Sandra's housewife (and her material culture displays) is a figure of forgetting, she is also a figure that is successfully reinserted into the cultural memory through the re-enactment event. The public respond very positively to her, and she triggers audiences' own memories of their mothers and grandmothers and their history during the Blitz. For Simon's roadwork diorama, the material culture on display and the persona of the road worker has no resonance for the populist public history aims of re-enactment.

### **Conclusion**

The three different aspects of the home front re-enacted by Sandra and Simon illuminates some of the ongoing negotiations over the cultural memory of the Second World War in contemporary Britain. First, Sandra's experience of re-enacting illuminates the difficulties of remembering the war through the personal and familial when they are underrepresented in the popular discourses that are part of the cultural memory of the war. Sandra, a woman born after the Second World War, recreates a particular representation of the working class housewife founded on her childhood experience of the war in popular and material culture, and also through her

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<sup>91</sup> Noakes and Pattinson, 'Introduction', p. 9.



grandmother. This concurs with Eley's and Summerfield's view of how people born after the war can 'remember' the war.<sup>92</sup> However, when she began to re-enact the working class housewife she encountered an absence of available discourses with which to engage with the wider cultural memory of the war.<sup>93</sup> Unable to use either masculine, militarized narratives about the war or the hierarchical understanding of women's contribution to war, Sandra instead used re-enacting as a vehicle for composing her own personal narrative and re-instating the role of the housewife back into the popular memory of the war. Rather than being silenced by the lack of relevant available discourses, Sandra's re-enacting illustrates people's agency in constructing the cultural memory of the Second World War.

Re-enacting also offers historians an opportunity to observe the reception to historical representations and to uncover the multidirectionality of memory and its polysemic nature. The public response to Simon's portrayal of a Bevin Boy illustrates how a representation of one aspect of the home front can be a trigger for productive discussions of various historical events. His experience at events suggests that the Second World War can still be used to understand later events such as Thatcherism and that, far from fixed, the meaning and the legacy of the war is still open to challenges and contestation.<sup>94</sup> Finally, the public response to the 'Road Up' display demonstrates in a visibly compelling way that personal memory needs to be able to fit within the existing frameworks of the cultural memory of the war for it be successfully understood by broader groups and communities.<sup>95</sup> Road building clearly has no populist image, like the Bevin boy, or no emotional content and familial reference point, like the housewife, and thus struggles to resonate with people and thus remains on the margins of the cultural memory of the war. Bringing the conversations captured on camera into a dialogue with the scholarship on the cultural memory of the Second World War has shown that cultural memory is a process of continual negotiation between the private, personal, and familial, and the public. Where these processes can be difficult for the

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<sup>92</sup> Eley, 'Finding the People's War', p. 818; Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 74.

<sup>93</sup> Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p. 74; Peniston-Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze', pp. 74 - 76.

<sup>94</sup> Eley, 'Forward', p. xviii.

<sup>95</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, pp. 172 -173.

historian to locate, re-enacting offers a site where film-making can observe, document and discuss these ongoing negotiations.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Bradford Vivian, “‘A Timeless Now’: Memory and Repetition’ in Kendall R Phillips (ed), *Framing Public Memory* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), p. 204.

## Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the re-enactment group *UK Homefront* in order to demonstrate how film-making is a viable and useful method for historians. Specifically it demonstrates how observational film-making can be a valuable tool for the study of public history and cultural memory; film-making can offer fresh insights into how ‘popular history-makers traverse the terrain of the past that is so present for all of us’.<sup>1</sup>

In my thesis, film-making has allowed me to document how and why members of *UK Homefront* ‘make’ history and commemorate the Second World War. I showed them at a number of events re-enacting different aspects of the British homefront experience and engaging with the past through material culture, performance, and their interactions with each other and their audiences.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, through film-making my research revealed the emotional, sensory, and embodied connections that Sandra Day and Simon Kerstin have forged with the history of the homefront through family history, personal experiences of childhood, environment, work, and material culture. This thesis also investigated how historians could represent their research outcomes for an academic audience using both film and prose; in the case of this project, by producing a fifty minute research film along with the 50,000 word written element of this thesis. Film is a medium that allows the historian to share research insights that are ill-suited to textual analysis, whereas prose is a better medium for discussing abstract ideas that engage with a body of scholarly work.

As an examination of film-making as a tool for historical research, this thesis has helped to crystallise some of the strengths of this approach. At its best, film-making has given voice to those at the heart of this project and this thesis has been able to reflect the personalities, thoughts, and attitudes of the group in a persuasive and compelling manner. Furthermore, film-making has been a particularly successful method for capturing the emotional meaning that both Sandra Day and Simon Kerstin find in the past. This aspect of public history can often be hard to access through textual sources

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, ‘The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life’, in Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds.), *The Public History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Emma Waterton, ‘People and their pasts: public history today’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17:2, (2011), pp. 195-196.

and oral testimony alone and film-making has in this instance sensitively revealed the role of material culture, family history, contemporary experience and social interactions in how people find and make meaning in the past. My research film has also enabled this thesis to illustrate the emotion involved in re-enacting in a way that compliments and arguably enhances the accompanying prose.

As a historian, observational film-making also proved to be a useful method for my own engagement with the members of *UK Homefront*. I believe that the ‘focused-looking’ necessary for observational film-making enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the group’s re-enacting practice as a pedagogical tool. This understanding informed my research film, from how I chose to film certain events, to the editing but also the written thesis. Indeed, where this understanding can sometimes be obscured by the conventions of academic writing and the unfamiliarity of film-making, this conclusion is an opportunity to strongly note that insights generated through observational film-making greatly informed my written thesis, particularly in regards my analysis of their use of re-enacting as pedagogical tool and in terms of cultural memory.

It is also worth noting that the production of a research film alongside the written thesis is a further benefit of film-making as a tool. For the members of *UK Homefront* the film and research clips are a valuable record of their own practice over a long period of time and are an outcome of the research that they can more easily engage with than the written thesis. Furthermore, being hosted online makes this material easily accessible for the group, the public that they speak to at events and indeed anyone outside the academic community. Finally, from the perspective of the film-maker/researcher, the prospect of a film at the end of the project was an attractive incentive for members of the group to remain involved in the project. In this sense, the use of film is a considerable benefit for both the researcher and the subjects of public history research projects.

This thesis has also been useful in highlighting a number of issues and potential limitations for historians interested in using film-making for research. Firstly, whilst the use of observational film-making has been beneficial for understanding the processes and practices involved in re-enacting and the motivations of re-enactors, it is an approach that relies heavily on access. Without access to a re-enactment group or any

other subject such as a museum or community history project this method is of only limited use. For example, had *UK Homefront* been unwilling to participate fully in the project I would have had to turn to an alternative group or focus for my research. Additionally, it is a method that requires a sustained period of fieldwork that allows time for the historian/film-maker to develop the relationships and access necessary for this approach to begin to bear fruit. In my own experience, I was again fortunate that *UK Homefront* were willing to make the commitment to my project and to give me the time to follow them in their re-enacting, both publicly and privately.

Secondly, observational film-making is an approach that can depend on recording what is happening in the present and as such may only be appropriate for a limited number of areas of historical research. In my own practice, I chose to use *UK Homefront* as a lense through which to focus on public history and cultural memory. These were two areas where observational film-making was most likely to produce insights into key areas of historical interest. It remains to be seen how historians can use film-making to generate new film-making methods that are perhaps better suited to exploring other areas of interest.

Indeed, rather than focusing on contemporary aspects of history, it would be worth exploring if and how film-making can be used to generate research into earlier periods of history such as the sixteenth century or medieval England. In addition, it would be interesting to use film-making to explore the historical imagination in more innovative ways; drawing on experimental film-making techniques, such as the creative re-enactment practices used by Peter Watkins in *La Commune* (1999), future studies could explore the imaginative role history plays in people's lives.

Writing in 1988, Paul Thompson discussed the anticipated impact of oral history on academic history. He argued that oral history:

can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers...between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history – whether in books, or museums, or radio and film – it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 26.

Thompson goes on to suggest that ‘once the life experience of people of all kinds can be used as its raw material, a new dimension is given to history’.<sup>4</sup> Thompson’s vision for the future of oral history reflects my own exploration of film-making as a research method. Film-making has the potential to open up new areas of inquiry, offering new perspectives on existing debates, and helping to bridge the gap between academic historians and people making history in their everyday lives.

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson, ‘The Voice of the Past’, p. 28.

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### Appendix 1: Events attended by *UK Homefront* in 2013 and 2014

Date	Venue	Type
2 - 3 March 2013	Chesterfield Museum	Museum
30 March 2013 - 1 April 2013	Eden Camp Museum	Museum
20 - 21 April 2013	Colwyn Bay	Other
11 - 12 May 2013	Elvington Air Museum	Museum
25 - 27 May 2013	Brodsworth Hall	Heritage Site
7 June 2013	Yorkshire Museum of Farming	Museum
17 - 18 June 2013	Farmer Copleys	Other
29 June 2013	National Armed Forces Day, Nottingham	Other
20 - 21 July 2013	Sedgefield Veterans Weekend	Other
3 - 4 August 2013	Keddleston Hall	Heritage Site
10 - 11 August 2013	Cleethorpes 1940s Weekend	Other
17 - 18 August 2013	Lytham-st-Annes	Other
24 - 26 August	Eden Camp Living History Museum	Museum
31 August - 1 September 2013	Rufford Abbey	Heritage Site
28 - 29 September 2013	Sherwood Forest	Other
26 - 27 October 2013	Ellesmere Port Museum	Museum
22 - 23 February 2014	Chesterfield Museum	Museum
12 - 13 April 2014	Colwyn Bay	Other
10 - 11 May 2014	Elvington Air Museum	Museum
7 - 8 June 2014	Midlands Railway Centre	Heritage Site
26 - 27 July 2014	Kelham Island	Heritage Site
9 - 10 August 2014	Cleethorpes 2014	Other
16 - 17 August 2014	Lytham-st-Annes	Other
23 - 25 August 2014	Eden Camp Museum	Museum
7 September 2014	Baston Village	Other
13 - 14 September 2014	Burtonwood Air Museum	Museum
13 September 2014	Sheffield Cathedral	Other
27 - 28 September 2014	Rufford Abbey	Heritage Site
4 - 5 October 2014	Sherwood Forest	Other
08 November 2014	Sheffield Cathedral	Other

This table shows the dates of events, venues, and whether the venues can be classified as Museums, Heritage Sites, or 'Other'. 'Other' denotes venues that are not site specific and can range from a high street shop such as Colwyn Bay or a village green such as Lytham-st-Annes.