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Travers, Daniel

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Collective Expressions of Memory in the Isle of Man

WORLD WAR II IN BRITISH MEMORY

Much has been written about how Great Britain remembers the events of World War Two. The prevailing tendency within British society is to focus on the positive aspects of the War to see the entire war as 'Britain's finest hour' This often minimizes controversial aspects of the conflict, and the diversity of experience across the rest of the British Isles, in order to reinforce notions of British unity. This has been described by historians as the 'Churchill paradigm', which manifests itself not only in mental memory, but in collective expressions of a society's identity.

THE MANX AND THE WAR

The Manx experience of the war is primarily involved with a negative aspect of the war - internment. Do they remember the war in a typically 'British' way? Or, due to their unique identity and history, have they charted their own mnemonic course? By examining 'sites of memory', tangible forms of the commemoration of the war, it is possible to gauge how the Manx as a society, collectively remember the War.



HOUSE OF MANNANAN, PEEL

This living history museum takes the visitor through stories from Manx history. A wax likeness of Captain Kinley, a Manx sailor who participated at Dunkirk, tells his story. This is described by a narrator as 'Captain Kinley's finest hour'.



MANX NATIONAL GALLERY, DOUGLAS

More than two thirds of the artwork in the 'Island at War' section is dedicated to internment on the Island. Including this painting of children behind the wire by Hugo Dachinger, an internee himself.



THE MANX MUSEUM, DOUGLAS

The entire 'Modern Social history' gallery at the museum is dedicated to internment, very rarely giving attention the military involvement of the Isle of Man. The Manx Museum deliberately minimizes this aspect of their story in order to highlight the unique Manx experience.



Step back in time

THE 'WIRE AND WOOL' STREET PLAY, PORT ERIN, AUGUST 2005

This production celebrated the role of the internee in Manx History. Focusing on many different aspects of the internee's story, the whole village became part of the cast to participate. It also involved former internees themselves.



MANX AVIATION AND MILITARY MUSEUM, RONALDSWAY

Run by the Manx Aviation Preservation Society and not funded by Manx National Heritage, this museum focuses on the military involvement of the island. It is kept alive by charitable donations.

ISLE OF MAN TATTOO, TYNWALD, JULY 2005

This was a celebration To mark the 60th Anniversary of the end of The Second world war. An attempt to fuse together British and Manx heritage, the celebration included a fly-past by a Spitfire aircraft, despite the fact that no Spitfires were ever stationed on the Isle of Man during the war.



CONCLUSIONS

Manx remembrance of the war is still connected to, yet distinct from typically 'British' celebrations. Through the use of National Heritage sites and commemorations, the Manx have sought to appropriate British commemorative tropes, while adding their own twist. This highlights their own distinctive contributions within the British National experience, while at the same time delimits their own unique culture and identity.

Daniel Travers,
Department of Music, Humanities and
Media.

