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Denial of the Darkness, Identity and Nation-Building in Small Islands: A Case Study from the Channel Islands

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Introduction

This chapter takes as its point of departure the opening chapter of the work of Gabriella Elgenius (2011) and, to a lesser extent, the work of Benedict Anderson (2006) who has argued that nations are but ‘cultural artefacts’ and ‘imagined communities’. I am drawn to the idea that the nation as an entity exists first and foremost in the imagination, an artefact comprising various elements chosen to fit that imagining. For, as will be discussed in this chapter, just as nations are cultural artefacts, so too are the aspects of heritage that they choose to symbolise, imagine, define and build themselves. Elgenius argues that symbolism is an important part of the nation-building process. For her, these symbols include such things as flags, anthems and national days. She further states that ‘nations are layered and their formations ongoing and visible in the adoption of national symbols’ (2011, p. 1). Taking the Channel Islands as my case study, in this chapter I shall argue that the German occupation of 1940–1945 added a new layer to the islands’ identity. That is, it provided a new range of symbols and events (cultural artefacts) out of which new identities were imagined and constructed. Alongside new layers of post-occupation identity that have gradually accreted since 1945, the formation of the nationhood of the Channel Islands has similarly been an ongoing process and has been subject to similar ongoing change.

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Elgenius (2011) suggests that it is not just through symbols alone that a nation builds itself; it is also through ceremonies, museums, monuments and the land itself, which I take here to comprise national heritage sites contained within the landscape. Symbols and ceremonies, which are themselves aspects of heritage, ‘mirror the pursuits of nations... the nation-ness becomes visible through these symbolic measures’ (ibid, p. 2). For the purposes of this chapter, I will be focusing on heritage sites—key sites which can otherwise be termed ‘national heritage’ because of their importance. After all, a nation constructs itself through its heritage just as much as heritage, in turn, shapes a nation.

It will not escape the scholar of heritage or memory studies that the list of features of a nation appears to correspond closely to Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, the sites or realms of memory which Nora defines as ‘any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element in the memorial heritage of any community’ (Nora 1996, p. xvii). Nora’s work demonstrates how memory binds communities together and creates social identities (Kritzman 1996, p. ix) and also, in this case, builds nations. Thus, I shall be making a direct analogy here between the cultural artefacts of Nora’s sites of memory and Elgenius’ symbols and sites of nationhood, for it seems to me that they can be seen as one and the same. They have both been chosen by the nation to speak for the identity of the nation.

In this chapter, it is my intention to select particular sites of memory—in this case, certain aspects of dark heritage in the Channel Islands relating to the German occupation—to observe how the islands have constructed their identities and post-war sense of nationhood over time. These will be used as a way of illustrating the difficulty that the islands have had in coming to terms with their dark past. I shall argue that the heritage chosen has been carefully selected to make a certain statement and to deny or marginalise others. Above all else, that heritage—and heritage interpretation—is partial and has involved blocking the darkness that is readily apparent to non-islanders or indeed denying that it ever existed. The Channel Islanders have had a historic inability, I shall argue, to perceive their dark past. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the islands are not large and it is surely difficult to co-exist with major dark sites in one’s back yard. With every passing generation, different aspects of the German occupation have been presented to the public in heritage creation and it is only very recently that the darkness has begun to be admitted, although this has not been an even process and has been slower in some islands than others. As places which

sometimes seek to be seen as nations in their own right, the islands have to consider how they are perceived by outsiders, but how has this affected their heritage?

Before we can discuss nationhood and the Channel Islands, however, we must first admit to some difficulty in accepting the islands as nations in their own right, even though they are clearly bounded. We cannot accurately refer to each of the Channel Islands as individual nations; like the Isle of Man, they are Crown Dependencies—although they certainly have many of the qualities otherwise needed to define themselves as nations on the grounds of their independence, which is an important pre-requisite. The Channel Islands have their own parliaments (the States of Deliberation in Guernsey and the States of Assembly in Jersey) which are headed by Bailiffs, the presiding officers in each island who are also presidents of the Royal Court. The Bailiffs are appointed by the Crown and are the Bailiwicks' leading citizens. The Lieutenant Governor in each of the Bailiwicks of Guernsey and Jersey acts as the monarch's personal representative but, in matters concerning the governance of the islands, the Bailiffs take precedence over the Lieutenant Governors. The Channel Islands, however, are not constitutionally independent of the UK and look to the mainland for defence, although they are not part of the UK administratively or legally. The relationship between the islands and the UK is, thus, complex because the islands are not sovereign states in their own right.

Nevertheless, while the Channel Islands may not be wholly independent of the UK, one of the proudly acknowledged characteristics of Channel Islanders is their stubbornly independent nature coupled with their strong dislike of being told what to do by outsiders. Thus, in recognition of this, as well as their independent parliamentary and legal systems, and their distinct and unique culture and history, for the purposes of this chapter, I shall treat the Bailiwicks of both Jersey and Guernsey as nations.

Channel Islands Occupation Heritage

There are many differences between the identity of the UK and the Channel Islands based on their different but linked histories over the last 800 years. The key distinctive feature of modern Channel Islands identity is the fact that while the UK was not occupied by German forces during World War II, the Channel Islands were. Moreover, that occupation plays a huge role in the self-identity of both Bailiwicks today. In this chapter, I shall examine the role of

the symbols of national identity and memory that have led to the creation of heritage, arguing that this powerful triumvirate has combined to present an image of the occupation, consumed by locals and tourists alike, which effectively whitewashes the darkness out of the experience. Whether this is because Channel Islanders are in denial about the darkness and perhaps have still not come to terms with it after 70 years, or because they genuinely cannot see the darkness, is unknown. Either way, the result is the same. I argue in this chapter, therefore, that darkness is culturally constructed and is in the eye of the beholder. It is not a fixed category, unambiguous and clearly there for all to experience. Nor does it reside in a place to be emitted as an 'aura'. It clearly is not even based on knowledge of what took place at a site, for Channel Islanders are extremely interested in their local history and are generally well-informed. However, a distinction should be drawn between myth and history, because there are certain myths of the occupation (another national symbol) that are more readily consumed by and repeated among the general population. It is in the interstices—or rather, the crevasses—between history and myth where the darkness has been swept, often able to be reached and resurrected (or even detected in the first place) only by outsiders. The popularly told myths of the occupation which impact occupation heritage and concepts of identity have long since banished the darkness.

The main war narrative in the Channel Islands today is the Churchill paradigm, which gives a sanitised view of the past and is a heavy influence in the 'myth of correct relations'. Before we can discuss the Churchill paradigm and its impact, however, it is important to recognise the curious fact that, while the Channel Islands had a similar experience of war to that of other occupied countries in Western Europe (including the persecution of Jews, the deportation of people who committed acts of resistance, the importation of slave labourers, starvation and hunger, and so on), their war narrative is far removed from that of other European countries. Rather than perceiving themselves, as other Europeans do, as victims of occupation or martyrs for having been sent to their deaths in prisons or camps for acts of resistance against the Nazis, the Channel Islands have adopted the British war narrative. As Britons who were liberated by British military forces, they shared in a British victory and thus saw, and see, themselves through a Churchillian lens. According to Paul Sanders (2012, p. 25), the 'Churchillian paradigm' embraced a narrative of 'sublime and unwavering steadfastness in the face of adversity' as soon as the war came to an end. This paradigm states that 'the British were not a nation of victims, but of victors' (Sanders 2005, p. 256). It was a narrative of heroic victory which excluded any rival version of events and disregarded the multiple divergent memories of occupation. The 'myth of correct relations' plays

into this, described by Sanders (2005, p. 235) as being an official narrative that began in the immediate aftermath of the occupation and held currency into the 1990s, where:

...all or most Channel islanders had behaved as real Britishers, with an attitude and in a manner that was poised, exemplary, steadfastly consistent and scrupulously fair. Curiously, in this version the entire situation was devoid of the humiliation, desperation or compromise of principle occurring across the rest of Europe. ...Even Occupation government was done 'by the book' ...and the relationship with the Germans was correct, unspectacularly correct, as the islands had had the good fortune to have been run by a group of aristocratic gentlemen officers and not some red-hot Nazis.

It can be seen that the over-arching war narrative of Jersey and Guernsey dispelled the darkness from the experience of occupation from the earliest days and was responsible for an inaccurate war myth which still holds sway today among most of the population. This myth has impacted all aspects of national occupation heritage in the Channel Islands. It was an instrumental part of nation-building after the occupation and a way of helping the islands see themselves in a positive light after a humiliating and terrible experience.

Broadly, we can paint occupation heritage as existing in five areas: national days; national museums; national memorials and monuments; national symbols with continuing popular currency; and national sites in the landscape such as bunkers. Of course, as the Channel Islands are Crown Dependencies, the 'national' prefix is one that I have added myself. To all intents and purposes, however, the sites that I shall describe are principle sites of memory, acknowledged by all locally and, as such, the 'national' epithet is not misplaced.

The first and most important is probably the national day: Liberation Day, 9 May. This is a public holiday in Jersey and Guernsey, a time for commemoration and joyful festivities, and is without doubt the most important date in the islands' calendars. Shops decorate their windows with a wartime theme, articles in the local newspapers focus on the memories of the occupation generation and the islands are decorated with bunting (Plate 15.1). Significantly, the focus is on the end of the occupation (a very light heritage) and not the start of the occupation or any event of the middle (a darker heritage).

The second key aspect of occupation heritage is the occupation museums (also see Chap. 20). As discussed in detail elsewhere (Carr 2014a, p. 62), nine of these have previously existed at various times and seven remain open today (Carr 2014a, p. 62). These are not the main government-supported public



Plate 15.1 Decorations in St Peter Port in 2015 in readiness for Liberation Day (Photo Source: Author)

island museums but are, rather, privately owned by collectors of German militaria. Nonetheless, the collections that they hold are locally recognised as being of ‘national’ importance to the islands and their heritage.

Rather than telling the story of the occupation per se, the prime motive of the owners of the museums is to display the collections that they have built up since childhood. As such, displays are more often artistic, poetic or present a diorama which shows off a theme in a collection to its best effect. Collectors are not interested in showing items belonging to slave labourers, deported Jews or political prisoners because they argue that tourists are not interested in seeing such items (*ibid*, p. 75). Besides, such people were among the most dispossessed and were not known for their material possessions. While the casual visitor to a Channel Islands occupation museum might see mannequins of soldiers manning gun emplacements (although not actually pulling the trigger), they are also far more likely to see those mannequins listening to the radio, playing chess, modelling the German uniform, lying in their bunk or cooking food (Plate 15.2). The mannequins are not shown deporting, aim-



Plate 15.2 Inside the Command Bunker at Noirmont Point, Jersey (Photo Source: Author)

ing guns at, or harassing civilians. In fact, they do not interact with civilians at all. Once again, the darker side of occupation is not on show.

The third aspect of national heritage includes memorials and monuments to the occupation years. While these are to be found in great number throughout the islands, with at least 33 in St Peter Port and St Helier combined, almost a third were erected to commemorate significant anniversaries of liberation. My research has shown that, from 1985 onwards, the date at which the occupation began to be seriously memorialised, the last to be remembered have been the victims of the Nazi persecution, recognised in Jersey before Guernsey. Moreover, such memorials have been placed in marginal places and are significantly smaller than the liberation memorials (Carr 2012). It is clear once again that the darkest of narratives have been the last to be recognised and have not been allowed to challenge the national narratives of occupation.

There are two national symbols relating to the occupation that I would cite as having national currency today: The V-sign (in both Guernsey and Jersey) and the donkey (in Guernsey). Following the BBC's and Churchill's V-for-Victory campaign in 1941, which entailed encouraging the people in occupied countries to draw V-signs on walls and streets, to make the V-sound (in Morse code) and to signal to each other with V-gestures, the Channel

Islands adopted the campaign with vigour. Although the campaign was not aimed specifically at the Channel Islands, nevertheless they joined in, imagining themselves as part of a Europe-wide secret resistance army whose aim was to make the occupier feel surrounded by a hostile enemy. Subsequently, a number of islanders were caught and deported to Nazi-run prisons in France and Germany (Carr 2014b, pp. 43–63). Today, on Liberation Day, the V-sign, with its key symbolism of an Allied victory, is seen throughout the Bailiwicks and especially in garden decorations and on themed floats in the cavalcades and parades, which pass through St Peter Port and St Helier. However, it is the symbol, rather than the people imprisoned for using the symbol, which is remembered. The names of those deported are not well known.

The donkey is traditionally the mascot or ‘totem animal’ for Guernsey and symbolises the proudly cultivated trait of stubbornness in local people. A cartoon drawn on a birthday card towards the end of the occupation by a local newspaper cartoonist, Bert Hill, depicted a donkey standing on a map of Guernsey and kicking a rotund and clearly well-fed German out of the island. This image became iconic and is well known in the island today (Carr 2014c). It is possible now to buy cufflinks, tie pins, postcards, fridge magnets and T-shirts with the image. Again, this symbol is wholly light-hearted today and remembers a positive event (Plate 15.3).



Plate 15.3 National symbols on display in Guernsey (Photo Source: Jonathan Bartlett)

The final type of national heritage that I will discuss here, and the focus for the rest of this chapter, is the German bunker. Hundreds of these concrete fortifications are dotted around the coastlines of the Channel Islands today, and a small number have been selected to be developed into heritage sites. While some have been converted into occupation museums, others have been restored to how they would have looked when operational. While there is no single bunker that stands as a 'national monument' in either Jersey or Guernsey, there are many preserved or restored bunkers, some with a higher profile than others, which I have examined elsewhere (Carr 2014a). In 1979, Kreckler and Partridge wrote the first report which called for the preservation and scheduling of bunkers in Guernsey; subsequently five bunkers were included on the protected monuments list in 1982. More were recommended for listing in 1990 and were successfully registered soon after. In Jersey, a 1986 report recommended the protection of 15 fortifications as Sites of Special Interest (SSI) (Ginns 1986). Thus, for nearly 30 years, many bunkers have been protected as sites of national heritage. But whose stories are told inside them? How are those bunkers which have not become heritage treated? And what of the bunkers' forgotten and neglected counterpart, the labour camps, which housed the workforce who built them? Why should bunkers become an accepted part of national heritage when labour camps have not?

Bunkers and Labour Camps

Before we can explore the forgotten dark sites which are not recognised as public heritage sites, it is important to characterise them in terms of their state of existence or becoming. Only then can we understand which sites are avoided and which draw public attention and why; why darkness is acknowledged to adhere to one type of site and not the other and, indeed, why this perception may differ between tourists and locals. In order to address this, I would like to propose a schematic model, particularly suitable for the post-conflict situation, to describe the relationship between a dark event, a dark legacy, dark heritage and dark tourism (Fig. 15.1).

A dark event, such as military occupation, leaves behind it a tangible legacy or residue in the form of traces, ruins, debris, sites and objects, and an intangible legacy in the form of memories, trauma and psychological impact. All of these have the potential to be dark. If we take the example of dark sites which in this example might take the form of labour camps or military fortifications, none automatically enjoy the status of 'heritage'. Drawing on Laurajane Smith's concept of heritage, which she defines as 'the

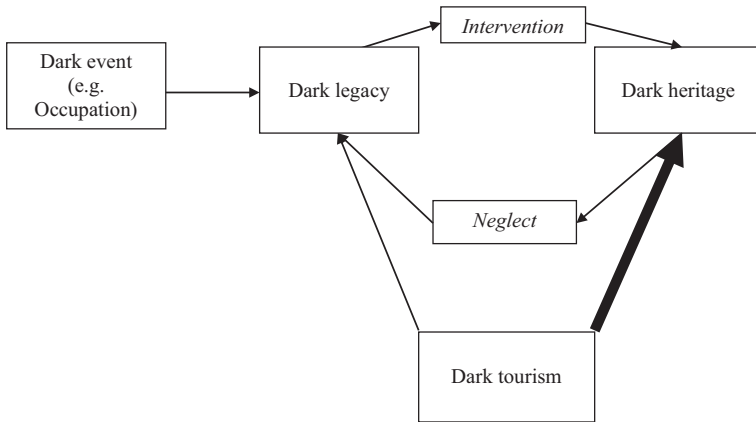


Fig. 15.1 Relationship between a dark event, a dark legacy, dark heritage and dark tourism

cultural processes of meaning and memory making and remaking rather than a thing' (2006, p. 74), I suggest that heritage has to be created or chosen through such active processes. For example, if a fortification is left untouched after a dark event, then sooner or later it will succumb to the passage of time. Plants and weeds will start to grow over it. It is still at the legacy stage with no certainty that it might ever become anything else. If not maintained, the fabric of the building will start to degrade and even collapse. This is not heritage; heritage is something (tangible or intangible) that is valued, selected and chosen to represent some aspect of identity of a group. For Channel Islanders, bunkers have been reclaimed from the weeds and from oblivion since the late 1970s. At and after this point, many have been renovated or restored. This active intervention has turned them into heritage. But heritage can just as easily be abandoned, neglected and turned back into legacy status. Thus, the passage between legacy and heritage can be cyclical and not necessarily linear. When tourists visit sites of German occupation in the Channel Islands, they are arguably more likely to visit heritage sites where there is 'something to see'; more likely (in this example) to visit bunker-museums or restored bunkers rather than abandoned bunkers hidden in the undergrowth. Because legacy sites are less known about by tourists then, predictably, more tourists visit heritage than legacy sites (represented by the different arrow thicknesses in Fig. 15.1).

This much may be true for tourists. But it is perhaps not so for non-tourists. In the Channel Islands, a popular pastime at weekends is to 'go bunkering'. This involves visiting neglected, hidden or out-of-the-way bunkers still at 'legacy' status. It is here, and not in the restored bunkers, where a non-dark

narrative is provided, and where the darkness may be perceived locally. But what is the real difference between bunkers of legacy and heritage status? One might imagine that heritage-status bunkers have been more thoroughly researched and explored and, thus, the greater knowledge of the human rights abuses against slave and forced workers that took place there would lead to a heritage which proclaimed that history and acknowledged that darkness. One might also imagine that the people who have spent many years restoring and maintaining the bunkers might be those whose intimate knowledge of the sites has resulted in a familiarity with and awareness of their dark past and encourages them to embrace it. But this is not the case; these kinds of bunkers are not perceived locally to be dark places. We might conclude that perhaps long familiarity has bred contempt of the darkness, but such an assumption would be to ignore the impact of cultural identity. And it is cultural identity (and the role of the Churchillian war narrative within that) rather than historical knowledge per se that, I suggest, can dictate not only from where the darkness emanates, but who can perceive it in those places.

Rather than using bunkers as blank canvases for telling the story of an Allied victory and the post-war use of bunkers as the reclamation of Channel Island territory, the Churchillian paradigm instead dictates that bunkers are places to show off the strength and power of the enemy, an enemy that was overthrown. Thus, the display of guns and other militaria, uniforms, helmets and swastikas is to show off the spoils of war; the booty that became the property of the victor. Bunkers, therefore, did not become places to tell the story of victimhood, the narrative of the slave or forced labourer dragged across Europe to build bunkers, worked or starved to death. Bunkers, instead, became 'dark-proof', where the only admitted narrative was the defeat of the mighty Goliath told through the display of his strength, a scenario in which the Channel Islands take the role of David. Thus, it is only restored bunkers—bunkers-as-heritage—that have been converted to this use and which proclaim the dominant narrative.

The dominant Churchillian paradigm and the myth of 'correct relations' can also be seen as what Bell (2003) terms a 'governing myth' (which gains its dominance at the expense of dissident voices). Bell's 'mythscape' is the 'temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of people's memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted incessantly' (ibid, p. 66). While the majority of restored bunkers and bunker-museums in the Channel Islands are places where the Churchillian paradigm as governing myth is writ large, there are just two which have been used for other purposes and which reveal the space within bunkers as locations of mythscapes.

In Jersey, at La Hougue Bie and at Jersey War Tunnels, there are two German fortifications where the original heritage presentation espoused the Churchillian paradigm and which now, after conversion, upgrading and reconceptualisation by heritage professionals rather than amateur enthusiasts, embrace the role of bunkers as places where people suffered. The foreign labourers who built the bunkers are given back their names and identities and their individual stories are told. This contestation and subversion of the 'governing myth' of occupation has been controversial, not least because bunkers have long been symbolic spaces where whoever owns or controls that space also controls the narrative told within it. Indeed, the darkness inherent in both of these renegotiated bunker sites has now begun to be acknowledged. I argue, therefore, that the darkness does not lie (entirely) within the 'auratic quality' which such a site might emit and to which Seaton (2009, p. 85) refers, nor in the knowledge of what it was used for, but in the dominant narrative or governing myth that prevails in a place, and which often dictates the associated heritage interpretation. I also argue that local people are more likely than tourists to be affected by or wholly cognisant of the governing myth, having grown up with it and been taught it in school and seen it enacted in the streets on both ceremonial and celebratory occasions (national days) in the local calendar, such as on Liberation Day. Visitors and tourists, conversely, will be less 'indoctrinated' into or affected by governing myths. They may be ignorant of the governing myth (and thus not inoculated against or unable to see the dark like local people) and unaware of the uninterpreted legacy sites and head only to the heritage sites. They may perceive darkness to emanate from the very sites that local people do not perceive as dark.

Labour camps in the Channel Islands are not national heritage and neither are they sites of memory. They are, instead, *lieux d'oubli* or sites of oblivion as Nancy Wood has categorised them, and it is here where the darkness really resides or has the potential to reside if uncovered or recognised as heritage. These forgotten sites are intentionally avoided by public memory 'because of the disturbing affect that their invocation is still capable of arousing' (Wood 1999, p. 10).

There were around 12 slave and forced labour camps in Jersey and around 5 each in Guernsey and Alderney, not including temporary camps or the reuse of houses and other buildings in the islands for accommodation and penal prisons of the labour force. Alderney was also the location of a concentration camp run by the SS, Lager Sylt. In these camps lived the manual labourers of the Organisation Todt (OT), a paramilitary engineering organisation with a workforce of up to 16,000 by May 1943 (Cruickshank 2004, p. 204). It comprised voluntary, conscripted and forced workers, but also slave labourers. Among these were heterogeneous groups that included Jews who had been

rounded up in occupied Europe. Those sent to the Channel Islands included Poles, Czechs, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russians, Belgians, French, North Africans, Dutch, Spanish Republicans and also German ‘criminals’ and political prisoners (Cohen 2000, pp. 122 and 130). Even local Channel Islanders attracted by the high rates of pay worked for the OT as cooks, interpreters, drivers and skilled labour (Ginns 2006, pp. 64–67; Bunting 1995, pp. 94–95). While various nationalities and groups of the labour force were treated better than others, and some even paid and given time off, the Russians, Ukrainians and people considered by the Nazis to be of ‘Slavic origin’ were categorised as *Untermenschen*, or sub-human, treated appallingly and often brutally, and given very little food. The number of deaths among these slave workers is disputed and will probably never be known with any accuracy, although it has been discussed and estimated in a variety of sources (Bunting 1995, p. 293; Cohen 2000, pp. 147–152; Cruickshank 2004, pp. 213–4; Ginns 2006, pp. 115–125; Knowles Smith 2007, pp. 9–30; Pantcheff 1981, pp. 64–74; Sanders 2005, pp. 191–230). These sources and others also record the testimony of a number of former slave workers and, consequently, the extreme suffering of these people is beyond doubt. Although a discussion of this is beyond the scope of this chapter, it will suffice to record that the unremitting hard labour involved in building bunkers, coupled with the starvation rations given to many workers, poor living and sanitary conditions, negligent working conditions, overseer violence and lack of medical attention directly contributed to or caused most of the deaths.

It can clearly be seen that labour camp sites today might be perceived as having strong residues or emanations of the darkness within them. Moreover, this darkness might be imagined to stem from their potential status as ‘terrorscapes’ (van der Laarse 2013). However, that same darkness is denied by local people to exist in heritage sites such as restored bunkers, even though bunkers were built by these labourers. Because darkness is something that is in the eye of the beholder, it exists in different places for different people. Different people of different cultural identities are affected by or brought up within different narratives and understandings of war.

Walter argues that one of the factors which conspires to darken sites of death is those deaths which ‘challenge the collective narratives of a nation’ (Walter 2009, p. 52). We have already noted that the war narrative of the Channel Islands has traditionally and specifically excluded victims, especially victims of Nazism, and therefore one of the reasons why these camps have been obliterated or ignored is because of their power to upset the heritage status quo and governing myth. Indeed, not one of these camps has become a heritage site. Each of them remains at the status of a legacy or just a memory, for most have been completely destroyed and modern buildings have been

constructed on the sites. Even this is an interesting observation, for who would want to live on top of a former labour camp? It is unknown how many people are aware of the wartime history of the patch of ground in the islands upon which they live but, at the same time, it is possible that the passage of time since the war has lessened the power or perception of the darkness which might adhere to such sites.

In Alderney, for example, there are bungalows built on top of Lager Helgoland, a labour camp which was thought to house Jews (Ginns 2006, p. 85). Here, the former entrance posts to the camp are used as the entrance posts to the driveway of one of the bungalows. At Lager Norderney, now the island's camp site for tents and caravans in summer, various concrete structures are still visible in the long grass. Local people here, in such a tiny island, are surely aware of what they are living and camping on top of. The traces of Lager Borkum in Alderney today stands either side of the track that leads to the island's rubbish dump. The ruins of Lager Sylt lie abandoned, covered by the lush vegetation for which the island is famed. In 2008, this camp became the first and only one in the islands to receive a memorial plaque, but even this was placed on the entrance post of the camp by a former Polish prisoner and was not a local initiative (Plate 15.4). More so than in Jersey and Guernsey,



Plate 15.4 The entrance posts of SS Lager Sylt, Alderney (Photo Source: Author)

where they are less visible, the camps are sites of oblivion in Alderney. There has even been a marked reluctance to support archaeological excavation in Alderney (Sturdy Colls 2012, p. 94)—clear evidence of these camps' status as *lieux d'oubli*.

The situation is little better in Jersey and Guernsey, although fewer traces remain. Rather than being sites which people expressly avoid, more of them have been obliterated in the landscape. It seems that while traces remain, the power of the darkness of these sites is too much to tolerate. While labour camps have been categorised as merely the 'accommodation' of the men who worked on the bunkers (Ginns 2006, p. 74), a neutral word that implies nothing sinister, we know that the reports exist in Jersey of Russians being kept in cages or wire compounds within camps such as at Lager Udet in St Brelade. Moreover, some camp commandants were known for their brutality, such as at Lager Immelmann in the parish of St Peter (*ibid*, pp. 78–80). There are also numerous reports by local people of the torture and bad treatment of the foreign workers by their overseers. One of the better known accounts was that of Senator Edward Le Quesne in Jersey, whose diary entry for 20 February 1943 recorded that he had seen in the parish of St Ouen a Russian in the pillory with two branches of trees tied tightly around his neck with the man just able to touch the ground with his toes. As he had an armed guard standing over him, nobody was able to help him (Le Quesne 1999).

While one might have imagined the labour camps of the Channel Islands to be the prime sites of darkness today, this is apparently not the case because they are simply ignored rather than actively avoided. It is possible that these places have lost much of their darkness because they have been neutered through destruction or neglect. But, by not confronting what happened at these sites or to the people who were forced to reside there, local people are able to continue ignoring them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these sites do not have the power to grow darker if ever they are uncovered and draw an audience. To excavate sites such as these, however, risks revealing something which people may not yet be prepared to face. It is known, for example, that Jews were among those brought to the Channel Islands to work for the OT (Cohen 2000, pp. 121–154; Sanders 2005, chapter 6), and this adds to the potential feelings of anxiety about what could yet be revealed.

While labour camps are not presented as tourist sites, it is not entirely true to say that they are not visited; local historians or researchers sometimes visit these sites, and former OT workers have also made the pilgrimage back to the sites of their suffering. Photographic evidence exists of this in Jersey, probably in 1970, when resident Spanish Republicans who stayed behind after the occupation visited the sites of camps in the island (Gary Font pers. comm.).

A similar event also took place among former prisoners when the memorial plaque was attached to the gate post of the concentration camp of Sylt in Alderney in 2008.

It is difficult to tell whether the general dissipation of the darkness of labour camps in Guernsey and Jersey happened slowly over several generations or, as is more likely, whether the real neutering of the camps took place quite early on, when they were destroyed or dismantled by the Germans and locals alike. It is not known whether the motivation for the destruction or removal of any of the camps stemmed from a desire to cover up the evidence of their crimes (in the case of the Germans) or not to be reminded of the crimes that took place on their soil (in the case of the islanders). It was probably a combination of both coupled with a need for firewood in the last harsh winter of the occupation.

While we may wonder at the lack of anxiety of islanders over the role of their islands in the Holocaust in particular, we should remember that it was not until the early 1970s, following the Eichmann trial of 1961, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the 1968 student protests, that the Holocaust began to assume centre stage in the consciousness of Western Europeans (Koonz 1994, p. 269). By this time, the state of preservation of most labour camp sites in the Channel Islands may not have been too different to their status today, as the photos taken around this time by Spanish Republicans in the island attest.

Should we be concerned that most of these sites have apparently lost their power to disturb? Is it sometimes a good thing for dark sites to lose their darkness? On the one hand, it means that communities can reclaim the land for the living, let go of the past and move forward, ridding themselves of the burden of war, all of which might be perceived as a thoroughly healthy and positive thing several generations after the original conflict. On the other hand, there are ethical ramifications to ignoring such sites. Even the apparently innocuous camps of many forced labourers from Western Europe (as opposed to slave labourers from Eastern Europe) housed people who were taken against their will or who had little choice but to agree to work for the OT rather than face an unknown fate in Germany (Sanders 2005, p. 205). Human rights abuses within a corrupt system were endemic inside the OT and to differentiate between camp types, or to label some as darker than others depending on who lived there and how they were treated, is to turn one's back on past suffering.

The current neglect of labour camps does not necessarily indicate their terminal position. The legacy of war does not have a pre-ordained trajectory or life cycle; something that is covered in the undergrowth or long forgotten does not have to remain in that state. Interventions by archaeologists or any

other stakeholder to uncover and preserve the camps are possible, but the success of these efforts will be dictated either by the local community or by those in positions of authority who have the power to sanction or loudly welcome such interventions. However, as Geyer and Latham (1997, p. 7) wisely point out, 'no preservation, however perfect, can save these traces for the present unless they are accepted in the present'. An uncovered site imposed upon the local community as 'heritage' can return to its previously neglected state if locally rejected or disliked. The converse is also true.

But if members of the local community show no sign of wanting to change the status quo, as seems apparent in the Channel Islands, do outsiders have any right to intervene and engineer or impose a change of any kind—to force them to come face to face with the darkness? If local people are not capable of discerning the darkness at a site, or deny that the darkness exists, can and should darkness be forced upon them for educational or ethical reasons, such as raising awareness about the people who once suffered there, or to try to change the war narrative of a place through force? How possible or ethical is such an attempt? Is a desire to show respect to victims of Nazism enough to claim the moral high ground?

We must also not lose sight of why members of the local community have not turned the camps into heritage. Such a decision makes a statement about what Channel Islands identity does and does not embrace, with the associated implications that to force a change is an attempt to manipulate or misrepresent locally held concepts of identity and even collective memory. Arguably, however, the decision to ignore this legacy of occupation was taken many decades ago and the subject has never re-arisen for debate.

Since the 50th anniversary of liberation, islanders are more open to embracing and remembering victims of Nazism, especially in Jersey; progress has been slower in Guernsey, however, and is hardly detectable in Alderney. Nevertheless, if the subject of camps were discussed again today, it is possible that the outcome could be different. With this in mind, in 2014 and 2015, I began the very first excavation of a labour camp in the Channel Islands. I carried out work at Lager Wick in Jersey, a forced labour camp for French workers, Spanish Republicans and French North Africans (Carr [forthcoming](#)), and today a nature reserve for wild birds. The excavation blog was followed by people from 55 to 51 different countries in 2014 and 2015, respectively, the highest number of 'hits' coming, perhaps not surprisingly, from the UK and Jersey. While the excavation also attracted coverage by the local Channel Islands media and the associated public lecture I gave drew a large audience, I discovered that the labour camp I had excavated was either not being perceived as 'dark' by local people, or any unmistakably dark elements were either

being denied permanent exposure or given a lighter spin in accordance with the Churchillian paradigm and its avoidance of a narrative of victimhood. Four examples will suffice to back up this observation.

First, the only remaining feature of Lager Wick above ground, in addition to a ruined wall of the latrine block, was its concrete entrance posts, complete with several strands of barbed wire wrapped around them (Plate 15.5). These had previously been covered in so much ivy that the posts appeared entirely indistinguishable from the surrounding trees. During the first season of excavation, I stripped back the ivy, revealing the posts once again for the first time



Plate 15.5 The entrance posts of Lager Wick, Jersey (Photo Source: Author)

in decades. Such a structure was undoubtedly, to my eyes, an almost iconic feature of a Nazi camp and my recommendation to the land owners and the local planning authorities was to leave them uncovered as part of presenting the site to the public as a heritage site. This recommendation was turned down as it was deemed more important to allow wildlife habitats to be restored to their previous state before I arrived, thus covering up once again the only recognisable dark feature of the camp. Second, I also corresponded with local historian, Michael Ginns, who lived near Lager Wick during the occupation, and showed him photographs of the barbed wire. He was most unwilling to accept that it came from the era of the labour camp and suggested instead that it was erected in 1945–1946, when the land was used for grazing cows.

Third, a few months after the first season of excavation, I was sent a PDF of an artist's impression of the camp and some text which would be placed on an information board by the side of the road by the camp. I was rather surprised to see a sanitised image of a spotlessly clean and orderly series of barrack huts with no hint of squalor or barbed wire, and the concrete entrance posts had been omitted. Representations to those who manage the site resulted in slight changes, but still no sign of barbed wire or the entrance posts graced the final image which is now in place outside the site (Plate 15.6).



Plate 15.6 Information panel about Lager Wick, Jersey (Photo Source: Author)

Finally, during the second season of excavation, I uncovered both the ablutions block of the camp and a barrack block which, by the end of the excavation, I interpreted as belonging to the camp overseers because of the nature of the objects discovered. The excavation of the ablutions block made the lofty heights of page three of the *Jersey Evening Post*, although the article focused primarily on my call for local volunteers for the dig rather than on our discoveries. Then, on the penultimate day, I found the base of a mug which featured an eagle and swastika, the discovery of which made the front pages the following day. I imagined that this might be an opportunity to discuss the role of the overseers and their ill-treatment of the camp inmates but, after printing my quote which said that it was time to acknowledge the darker side of the island's heritage, the focus instead was on how the ablutions block would now be preserved as heritage.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the national identities of the Channel Islands changed irrevocably as a result of the German occupation. That occupation spawned a war narrative—a national myth—of ‘correct relations’ which, coupled with the Churchillian paradigm, deeply impacted the post-war heritage choices. In other words, these nations were re-imagined when Guernsey and Jersey chose a new range of post-war national symbols, sites, memorials and museums to rebuild and redefine their nations and identities. These, like the narratives and myths which dictated the choices, banished the victims of Nazi persecution and, with them, the darkness and the complexities of the occupation experience. It is only in recent years that they have been allowed back into the story of the occupation owing to the combined action of local politicians in Jersey and outside activism by academics.

I have argued here that the darkness in the heritage of the German occupation of the Channel Islands is in the eye of the beholder; it is primarily culturally constructed and understood, and can be denied, destroyed or marginalised by those who do not wish to (or simply cannot) see or feel it. This darkness, I have argued, comes from the ghosts of the past which haunt the ignored or buried legacies of occupation. In the Channel Islands, the Churchillian paradigm, with its avoidance of victims of Nazism and its focus on victory, and a ‘governing myth’ of correct relations with the Germans, has led to the avoidance and denial of the dark. Nevertheless, islanders are, on some level, haunted by these ghosts; they are aware of them but will draw instead upon less dark and less traumatic narratives of the past, even going to the extent of destroy-

ing structures which had the power to betray dark residues. While the casual tourist to the Channel Islands will see dark heritage everywhere, islanders themselves do not see their heritage in that way. Sites which have been chosen by them as heritage have been selected because they are not dark (to their eyes) and do not tell a story of darkness; rather they are made to conform to the governing myth which is part of Channel Islands' cultural identity. The dark legacies of occupation, on the other hand, are where the real darkness lies for them, and these have been destroyed, marginalised or ignored as sites of oblivion. Even when confronted with potential darkness, the eyes of these beholders paint it in lighter colours.

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