

Enemy Alien and Refugee: Conflicting Identities in Great Britain during the Second World War

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The speed at which France and the Low Countries fell in May 1940 created panic in Great Britain over the possible existence of ‘Fifth Columnists’. It was commonly believed that the only way the Germans could have made the territorial gains so swiftly was due to a large number of German sympathisers and spies resident in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. In the years preceding the Second World War approximately 80,000 German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian refugees, many of them Jewish, found temporary sanctuary in Britain.² In the early months of 1940 the prospect of a German invasion of the British mainland was a very real possibility. Attempts were made to recognise the fact that most enemy aliens had fled persecution in their home country and therefore tribunals were instituted in early 1940 in order to separate genuine refugees from potentially hostile enemy aliens. Classifications were given to each alien: ‘A’ denoted an individual deemed a threat to national security and called for immediate detention; ‘B’ was used for enemy aliens of whom the magistrates were unsure and led to certain restrictions on movement and the prohibition of the ownership of cameras, bicycles, and other items; and ‘C’ was the category reserved for genuine refugees. However, the fall of France caused such panic that a policy of wholesale internment was instituted, regardless of tribunal classification. After Italy declared war, any Italians resident in Britain were also interned, but without tribunal. This article will consider the experiences of internment during the war and how this has been remembered in the years following 1940. While the subject of internment has been examined in recent decades, little has been written regarding the enduring memory of the camps and how they

1 Rachel.Pistol.2009@live.rhul.ac.uk. Primary sources held at the Manx National Archives, Douglas, Isle of Man are denoted by archival numbers beginning with ‘M’ or ‘MS’. Interview recordings held at the Imperial War Museum are denoted by IWM. Home Office files stored at the National Archives, Kew begin ‘HO’.

2 London, L., *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees, and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 11; Brinson, C. and Dove R., *A Matter of Intelligence: MI5 and the Surveillance of Anti-Nazi Refugees, 1933–50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 1; Sherman, A.J., *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933-1939* (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1994), p. 7.

have been commemorated.³ There have never been formal reunions of those interned and the majority of former internees have not revisited the Isle of Man since their incarceration. To examine this, use will be made of previously unseen letters and interviews from those interned in the British camps, in addition to the rich archival resources of the Manx National Archives in Douglas, the National Archives in Kew, and the Imperial War Museum.

When Winston Churchill gave the order in June 1940 to 'Collar the Lot' formal arrangements regarding accommodation for the internees were still in early stages.⁴ Similarly to the First World War, the Isle of Man was mooted as the most suitable place to house enemy aliens, though other locations were sought on an interim basis. The majority of those interned were male, although several hundred women and children were also arrested.

Transit camps varied from vacant land where tents and barbed wire were hastily erected, to derelict mills, housing estates, and even prisons. For those women unfortunate enough to be interned early on in the process, their home was often Holloway Prison. Mothers were separated from their children as the governor deemed it cruel to introduce children to a prison environment.⁵ Once the Rushen internment camp had been established on the Isle of Man, however, women and children were more likely to be taken to a transit camp en route to Liverpool, where they would be shipped to the Isle of Man at the earliest possible opportunity. After the immediate panic of the initial round up was over, attempts were made to keep families together and avoid painful separations.

For the male internees accommodation varied considerably. Many internees were taken to Kempton Park racecourse in Surrey where the grandstand was used for accommodation.⁶ Countless other buildings

3 For examples of scholarship on the subject see Lafitte, F., *The Internment of Aliens* (London: Libris, 1988); Gillman, L. and Gillman, P., "Collar the Lot!", *How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees* (London: Quartet Books, 1980); Stent, R., *A Bespattered Page? The Internment of His Majesty's "Most Loyal Enemy Aliens"* (London: Deutsch, 1980); Chappell, C., *Island of Barbed Wire: Internment on the Isle of Man in World War Two* (London: Robert Hale, 2005); Cesarani, D., and Kushner, T. (eds.), *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1993).

4 Internment had actually begun the previous month — Churchill's exclamation was in regard to Italy joining the conflict. See Lafitte, *Internment*, p. xiv.

5 "Papers of Erna Nelki." 1941-2001, MS 12388. See also Winckler, J.R., "Two Sisters: A photographic project in four parts." 2002, MS 10688; and the use of Edinburgh Prison as mentioned in Johnson, J., "My memories of life in Rushen Internment Camp, May 29th 1940 to August 31st 1941 : a personal experience." 1990, MS 08866.

6 For examples see "Papers relating to the internment of the Beermann family." 1939-40, MS 11801; "Letters from Herbert Forner to family members." 1940-4, MS 11952; "Memoirs of Willy Leopold Hess, one time internee of Onchan Camp, Isle of

such as schools and barracks were used as temporary housing including, in one instance, the winter quarters of a circus.⁷ However, the most notorious of transit camps was Warth Mill, near Bury, Manchester more aptly termed 'Wrath Mill' by its reluctant inhabitants.⁸ The conditions at Warth Mills made the largest of all transit camps, an unfinished housing estate near Liverpool called Huyton, seem luxurious by comparison, despite the continued lack of adequate amenities.

For the majority of those interned, the Isle of Man was their home until release. The use of boarding houses guaranteed that the quality of accommodation available to the internees was of a much higher standard than the transit camps and every man and woman had a proper mattress on which to sleep, even if they initially had to share it with a stranger.⁹ Random billeting sometimes resulted in Jewish refugees being forced to share with pro-Nazis, but this was the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰ Further into internment, as people were moved between camps, complaints were made about the fact that vacated houses had been stripped of all things useful by the time of their next occupation, leaving 'dilapidated, dirty, drafty and cold, stripped of all furnishings,

Man, 1940-1." MS 11038; "Correspondence documenting the internment of Walter and Leopold Fiala." 1940-1, MS 12125; Heinemann, F.I., "Fritz Heinemann at Onchan." 1940, MS 12196. Lingfield Racecourse was also used, as noted in Bather, J.A., "A conversation with Steven Vajda." 1994, MS 11860; not forgetting York Racecourse, as in Lustig, F., "Memoirs of Fritz Lustig entitled 'Internment in Peel, July to October 1940.'" 2008, MS 11788.

7 Mendel, R., "Behind Barbed Wire." 2009, MS 12140; Kushner, T., *Remembering Refugees Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 76–7. Not forgetting the prisons that were used, see Kittel, W., "Papers relating to the internment of the Gerlachs and Wolfgang Kittel." 2009, MS12211; and "Papers documenting the internment and lives of Ludwig and Inge Hess and Inge's friend Mrs Helli Wimbush." 1989-2005, MS 11248; Brinson, C., Mueller-Haerlin, A., and Winckler, J., *His Majesty's Loyal Internee: Fred Uhlman in Captivity* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009), p. 52.

8 Jacobstahl, P., "Memoirs of Professor Paul Jacobstahl, onetime internee of Hutchinson Camp." MS 11626.

9 IWM, "Hellmuth Weissenborn Interview." 1978.

10 Such cases were exaggerated in newspapers sympathetic to the plight of the refugee internee, for example in the *News Chronicle*, October 15, 1941. A reply to the article was made in the *Daily Telegraph* by internee Renate De Garimberti, who asked the reader to remember that 'the beds are very big double beds' and therefore it was not as much of a hardship as the *Chronicle* made out. Dame Joanna Cruickshank, Commandant of the Rushen camp, explained that as soon as it became known a woman was a Nazi she was separated from Jewesses so that the camp could continue in harmony (*Manchester Guardian* interview reported in the *Isle of Man Times*, December 25, 1940). See also Cuthbert, C., "Papers of Cyril R Cuthbert, one time Commandant of Married Internees Camp." 1941-5, MS 11196; IWM, "Eva Wittenberg Interview", 1991; and "Papers of Erna Nelki".

old boarding houses.¹¹ This was particularly hard for those moved from camps that closed as their population dwindled, such as the inmates of Central camp who found themselves transferred to Onchan. As the population decreased, most of the internees had single rooms in Central camp, but found themselves forced back into sharing in 'filthy and poorly equipped' houses as 'everything that could be removed had been,' with limited washing facilities. It was at times like these that internees 'really felt like prisoners.'¹²

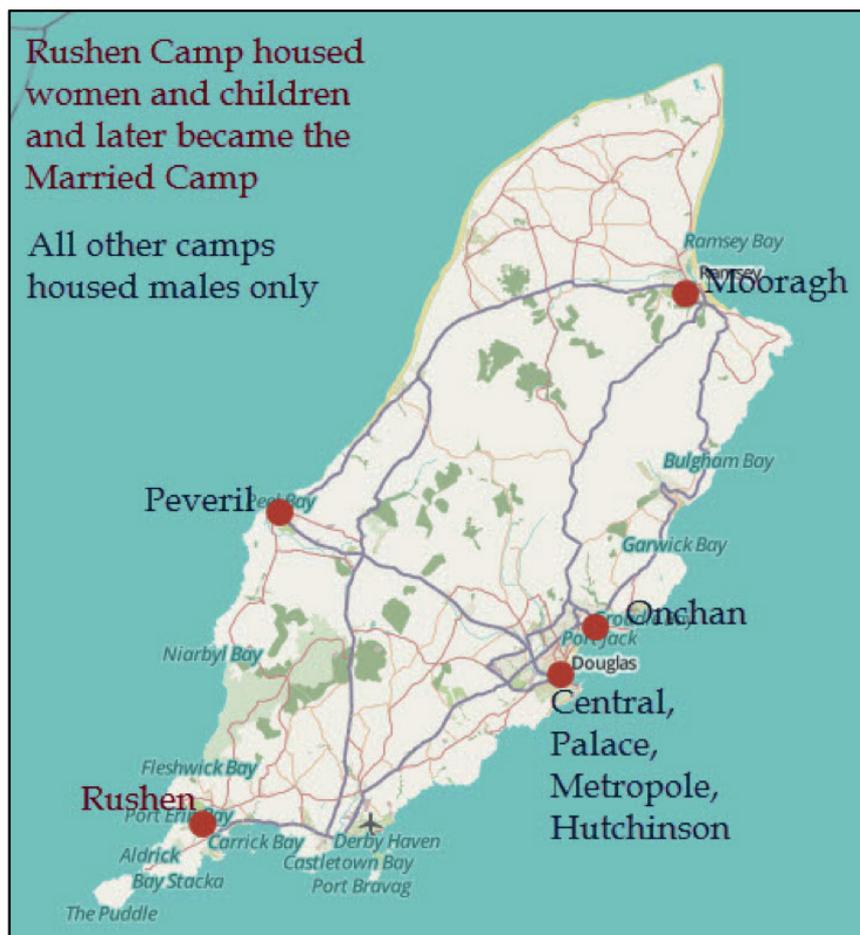


Figure 1 — Internment Camp Locations on the Isle of Man¹³

11 Baruch, L., "Reminiscences of Lou Baruch who was onboard the Arandora Star and transported to the Tatura camps." 2007, MS 11709.

12 Mendel, "Barbed". Professor Jacobstahl in his "Memoirs" remembers joking with his fellow internees that 'we often thought that it would have been much worse to have a voluntary holiday in this place'.

13 ©OpenStreetMap contributors/author.

However, there were some aspects to the camps on the Isle of Man that boosted morale. Internees could once again take control of their diet as cooking was done in the kitchen of each house. This was of particular significance to the Orthodox Jews, who had struggled to maintain a kosher diet since their arrest.¹⁴ In general, the food available on the Isle of Man was better than that on the mainland but internees could still find themselves going hungry on their rations. When canteens came into existence, internees with money were able to buy snacks or fruit to alleviate hunger and improve their diet.¹⁵ Requests for food parcels were also commonplace, especially for cakes and cured sausages.¹⁶ The camp cafes that sprang up and served selections of Viennese pastries and cakes were well received by both the internees and their guards.¹⁷

The British Government did not wish the internment camps to be run as prison camps, but rather wanted to give the internees some control over their daily activities. It was recognised, particularly after the initial frenzy of arrests, that the majority of internees had loyalties that lay with Britain. As civilians and not combatants the internees were in a very different position to that of Prisoners of War. By August 1940, Churchill's attitude towards the internees had changed and he told the Cabinet that it should 'now be possible to take a somewhat less rigid attitude in regard to internment of aliens.'¹⁸ Some of the Camp Commandants

14 Each camp established its own Orthodox houses, with their own cooks. See Helmuth Weissenborn Interview; Jochanan, F., "Inside Out: Isle of Man Revisited, 1940-2000." 2000, MS 10323; Jacobstahl, "Memoirs"; "Letters relating to Mr Aberbach relating to internment in Mooragh Camp." 1945, MS 11348; Brinson et. al., *Loyal Internee*, p. 90; and Sussman, M., "A Young Internee on the Isle of Man 1940-1." 2007, MS 11751.

15 Johanna Rieger complained that the food provided for the children was insufficient and it was essential that she supplemented their diet with fruit ("Johanna Luise Frida Rieger correspondence." 1940, MS 12203). Inge Hess and her friend would sometimes pick plants from the roadside to clean and eat to supplement their diet ("Ludwig Hess Memoirs"). See also Pinkus, I., "Letters written by Ille Pinkus." 1940 [Used by kind permission of Gaby Koppel]; Jacobstahl, "Memoirs"; and D'Allesandro, C., "Camp life on the Isle of Man in World War II: Memoirs of an Italian Internee." 1981, MS 11185, where Camillo noted that he developed a series of abscesses on his chin due the lack of vegetables and had cravings for anything green, even dandelion leaves.

16 See Pinkus, "Letters" for regular requests for 'salamiwurst', and D'Allesandro, "Camp life" where Camillo asked his wife to send him special cakes. Walter Fiala enjoyed the cake sent to him by his fiancée ("Fiala Correspondence"), as did Lou Baruch the piece of wedding cake he received through the post (Baruch, "Reminiscences").

17 When people complained about the perceived 'superior' quality of the food in the camps, a local vicar explained that a large number of cooks had been interned and therefore were better prepared for dealing with rations than the general population. IWM, "John Duffield Interview", 1979. See also *Isle of Man Daily Times*, October 21, 1940; and IWM, "Claus Moser Interview", 1997.

18 Gillmans, *Collar*, p. 231.

resented the lack of military discipline of the internees and preferred to deal with the more militaristic pro-Nazi elements in camp.¹⁹ The Camp Commandants and administration all originated from the military, and managing civilians was not in their regular remit. For both sides, then, it was beneficial to let the internees take charge of the minor points of administration.

Most of the Camp Commandants, however, got along well with their charges and did everything in their power to assist the internees. The male camps soon instituted a system pioneered at Huyton. Each house elected a 'house father' who reported to the 'street father', who in turn reported to the 'camp father', who relayed information to the Commandant. It was the responsibility of the 'house father' to make sure the general duties for the house were assigned to the men living there, and also to ensure attendance at roll call.²⁰ 'Street fathers' were responsible for forwarding grievances and requests to the 'camp father' and ensuring the houses on their street were kept in order. The men took very little time to organise themselves into working units. The female internees, by contrast, had a much more fluid arrangement. This is possibly because they were placed into boarding houses where the landlords and ladies were still residing, and therefore had a structure from the beginning, though rotas were drawn up for basic chores such as cleaning, cooking, and washing.²¹ The women's camp also had the additional complication of family arrangements for those women interned with their children.

Commandants were reminded to be respectful of religious observances and inspections were not to be conducted on Saturdays or Sundays in

19 Professor Jacobstahl said in his "Memoirs" regarding discipline: 'Jews are highly unsociable and utterly lacking the virtue of military discipline: at the roll-call they always had their hands in their pockets, and went on talking while the officers counted them. This lasted until the Commandant put up a notice on the Board... It must be no easy job to govern Palestine.'

20 If internees from their house were late for roll call, 'house fathers' could inflict punishments such as cleaning the floor, see Brinson et. al., *Loyal Internee*, p. 69. The evening roll call was much preferred to the morning roll call where individuals might be fighting to use the limited bathrooms all at the same time ("Willy Leopold Hess Memoirs"). See also Pistol, R., "Interview with David Brand about Dr. Angelo Lauria," 2014.

21 Hodge, M., "Memories and Personal Experiences of my Internment on the Isle of Man in 1940." 1999, MS 10119. See also Pinkus, "Letters"; and Dalheim, R., "Papers of Rosemarie Dalheim, a former teenage internee." 1940s, MS 11806. Sometimes some of the older internees with means would pay the younger internees to do some of the cleaning for them (Lustig, "Memoirs"), but for the most part everyone did what was required of them, not always cheerfully, as recalled in Brinson et. al., *Loyal Internee*, p. 95, where Uhlman described washing up as 'plain hell'.

order to allow religious observances.²² In general the internees found that the British '[had] great understanding for anything concerning religion.'²³ The biggest problem was the large amount of free time in the camps. Barring letter writing and morning and evening roll calls, much time was left to be filled by restless internees worrying about the fate of their families outside of the barbed wire. A great number of intellectuals, artists, and musicians were interned. For those with a creative bent the primary issue was finding suitable materials with which to sketch, paint, or sculpt. In Hutchinson Camp, the windows that had been painted a 'poisonous blue' because of blackout regulations became the focal point for artistic endeavour with etchings created showing scenes from the Talmud, mythology, as well as female nudes.²⁴ Pens and pencils were easier to come by, although sometimes paper was in short supply.²⁵ Spare pieces of linoleum and furniture stored in attics or cellars were often looted in order that lino cuttings and woodcarvings could be made. Wood was also used to make buttons, toys, and, in the women's camp, for children's creative play along with scraps of cardboard and discarded boxes.²⁶ Internees were mostly free to draw and create what they wished within the confines of the camp, and art was little censored as part of the policy to allow internees as much freedom as possible.²⁷

22 "Printed booklet entitled 'Home Office Orders for Internment Camps' (revised edition with amendments up to 30 June 1943)." 1943, MS 11293.

23 Mendel, "Barbed".

24 See the feature articles October 3, 27, and November 17, 1940 on the etchings in "The Camp: Hutchinson Square Internment Camp Journal Issues 1-6, 8-16, 20." 1941, M 27060.

25 Ink was more problematic but margarine was mixed with pigment as a substitute. A washing machine was press-ganged into use as an impromptu printing press using this ink mixture on lino cuttings in order to create printed items (Helmuth Weissenborn Interview).

26 See newspaper report, September 6, 1940 entitled 'Governor Among the Aliens' in "Papers of Harry Johnson (Methodist minister, Port St Mary) relating to his involvement with Rushen Internment Camp." 1940 - 1945. MS 09378, regarding the creations of school children in the women's camp. Many a boarding house owner returned to their homes after the war to discover much of what had been left in the house had been used for other purposes. See Cannell, H., "Hardships caused by the Internment Camps on the Isle of Man during the 1939 to 1945 War." 1996, MS 09555.

27 Fred Uhlman created some sketches himself (Brinson et. al., *Loyal Internee*, p.62), but also recalls exhibitions of work by Ehrlich, Kramer, Fechenbach, Markiewicz, Kahn, Hirschenhauser, Blensdorf, and Haman (p. 55). He was also familiar with the work of Kurt Schwitters who was interned in the same camp and was prone to recite poetry (p. 53). Other artists included Hellmuth Weissenborn, responsible for starting the etching trend, (Helmuth Weissenborn Interview); Ernst Muller-Blensdorf, a wood carver (November 13, 1940 issue of "The Camp"); Severino Tremator (Rossi, G., "Memories of 1940 impressions of life in an internment camp." 1991, M 28111).

Exhibitions were arranged in the different camps to demonstrate the fact that even within barbed wire, man's creativity could not be tamed. As the newspaper of Hutchinson Camp explained

The human being is not content to live and vegetate only. The tendency to produce, to create and to build up whatever it may be is deeper rooted in our conscience than many of us believe. To keep this spirit even under the most difficult circumstances, not to loose [sic] heart under hard conditions and to secure progress wherever we are, is more than our duty, it is our fate... [An] exhibition is more than a mere collection of drawings, paintings, sculptures and so forth. It is a sign, a signal and a challenge to everybody here: Go on with your work as well as you can; and if you cannot do anything in your old line, try a new one.²⁸

Highly renowned academics were to be found in all the camps, and this led to the creation of camp 'universities'.²⁹ The 'universities' provided the opportunity for individuals from a broad socio-cultural background to mix with others with whom they would not usually associate.³⁰ Each camp also established its own newspaper. Hutchinson Camp even developed a 'technical school' at which to train members of the camp in vocational skills. Schools also had to be provided for the children interned in Rushen Camp, though these took several months to come into being.³¹ Such was the demand for places that children could only attend one class per day.³² Lectures and classes provided the opportunity to relieve some of the tedium of internment as well as train individuals in new skills that would hopefully assist them in their post-internment careers. Each camp

28 "The Camp", 1940.

29 For examples of some of the academics interned see the 'Oxford Group' listing in Jacobstahl, "Memoirs".

30 "Willy Leopold Hess Memoirs". The National Central Library London, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Douglas Public Library provided 'books of a scientific nature' for the internees and it was estimated that there were 7,600 volumes available to browse ("Account of internment at P Camp, Hutchinson Square, Douglas." 1940s, MS 10739). Even when internees were transported abroad, the desire for libraries travelled with them (Baruch, "Reminiscences"). Ille Pinkus complained that the only books available in Rushen Camp were 'only bad books, just to learn English and occupy oneself' (Pinkus, "Letters"). See also Dalheim, "Papers". The subject matter of lectures and classes varied greatly: from experts on nutrition, doctors discussing human physiology, to those teaching French and English classes. November 24, 1940, "The Camp"; Ogbe, H., *The Crumbs Off the Wife's Table* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 2001), pp. 17–19.

31 Comments such as 'the children need school so badly' were commonplace at the beginning of internment, see letter dated December 29, 1940 in "Rieger Correspondence".

32 Ibid.

also created football teams in order to vent the frustrations of camp through physical exertion, and inter-camp competitions were held, again as means of boosting morale and cementing the community together.³³

Cabaret was a popular form of entertainment in both the male and female camps. The number of talented individuals interned meant that performances were usually of an exceptionally high standard.³⁴ Hutchinson, widely recognised as the most intellectual of the camps, offered entertainment at the highest level. Commandant Daniels, of Hutchinson Camp, upon learning that one half of the popular piano duet act Rawicz and Landauer was in his camp, hired two high pianos and arranged a concert.³⁵ 'The thrill and charm of beautiful music' had the power to banish thoughts of war from the minds of internees on a temporary basis.³⁶ Theatre performances were also popular, and later into internment weekly trips to the cinema were arranged, which were 'the chief distraction in [the] internee's monotonous life.'³⁷

Art, music, theatre, and films were used as means of transcending the confines of camp and allowed some respite from the emotional stresses of internment. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the British Government wished to avoid running the camps as prisons meant there were many more opportunities for creative expression than there would have been in a more restrictive environment. The wish was not so much to suppress the internees as to protect the rest of Britain from possible security threats. In order to combat the tedium of camp life, creative expression was actively encouraged by the authorities as a means to stimulate the internees out of the lethargy and depression so easily bred in camp. The

33 Regularly mentioned in "The Camp"; Rossi, "Memories"; Mendel, "Barbed"; and "Sefton Review 11 November 1940, No. 1 and 24 February 1941, No. 8." 1940–1, M 31547.

34 "Willy Leopold Hess Memoirs". German and English recitals of famous works such as Faust were also commonplace ("The Camp", 1940). In both the male and female camps, comment was often made about how unnatural the circumstances were that they were isolated in their pools of gender. As the 'Bradda Glen' song went "Nowadays on Bradda Glen, Holiday Camp without men, You see women left and right, Same by day and same by night" ("Beermann Papers").

35 Brinson et. al., *Loyal Internee*, p. 22. That was not the only time Captain Daniels intervened for the benefit of one of his internees. Heinrich Fraenkel was greatly assisted in his work *Help us Germans to Beat the Nazis!*, published by Victor Gollancz in 1941, by the provision of an attic room and a lifting of postal restrictions on his reading material (Ibid., p. 21).

36 "The Camp" Issue 1, 1940, which then went on to say incredulously 'And all this on a boarding-house piano!'

37 Henry Mendel commended a performance of 'The Silver Box,' August 5th 1941 (Mendel, "Barbed"). For references concerning the liberating feeling a visit to the pictures could have see Kittel, "Papers"; Dalheim, "Papers"; Brinson et. al., *Loyal Internee*, p. 70; John Duffield Interview; and Pinkus, "Letters".

intellectual and artistic pursuits mentioned served also to bond together a disparate community, as the internees were able to participate in collective experiences.

This creative and intellectual escapism was particularly important considering the emotional strains caused by internment. As a result of the single sex camps, many married couples found themselves trapped on the same island but unable to communicate with each other with any regularity. Mail between the women's camp in the south of the island and the men's camps in the north of the island could take several weeks, because letters had to pass via postal censorship in Liverpool. It was therefore decided that married visits should take place once a month.³⁸ Initially such visits were organised primarily with the intent of encouraging couples to consider the options of transport abroad, rather than for the internees' emotional welfare.³⁹ The married visits also served to showcase the lack of accurate records kept regarding internment. On the first visit many women waited expectantly for their husbands to arrive, only to discover that their men had, in fact, already been sent overseas.⁴⁰ For those that were fortunate enough to see their partners, the visits formed a 'joy and consolation to last until the next time,' though the visits were never long enough to greatly ease the distress of separation.⁴¹

Eventually, as the numbers of internees released increased and the number of camps decreased, the decision was made to turn Port St. Mary into the 'married persons' camp in 1941. Life in the married camp assumed a more normal routine than was possible in the single sex camps, certainly for many children life 'proceeded happily and peacefully. It was really like a family holiday without an end.'⁴² Additional benefits included the allocation of allotments on which fruit and vegetables were cultivated to share within the camp.⁴³ The married camp therefore helped families return to some semblance of normality in what was far from an ideal situation.

38 See, for example, the *Manchester Guardian's* interview in *Isle of Man Times*, December 25, 1940.

39 "Willy Leopold Hess Memoirs"; "Papers of Erna Nelki"; Dalheim, "Papers".

40 Ibid.

41 "The Camp", October 27, 1940. Industrious husbands and fathers would spend the intervening time working on gifts for their spouses or children. Frederick Beer-mann, for example, made his daughter, Edna, a rocking horse for one such visit ("Beer-mann Papers").

42 Dalheim, "Papers". For the mothers, being reunited with their husbands enabled them to share some of the burdens of childcare. Johanna Rieger, for example, had travelled to the Isle of Man alone with her three children and given birth to her fourth child whilst interned ("Rieger Correspondence").

43 See Sussman, "Young"; Cuthbert, "Papers"; and Dalheim "Papers".

What became the most controversial aspect of internment, however, was the transportation of just over 11,000 male internees to Canada and Australia.⁴⁴ The intention was for the British government to transport only those who posed the highest security risk. The first ship to depart for Canada, the *Duchess of York*, had on board a mixture of 'A' class internees and POWs, although somehow eleven 'C' category youths were also included. Thereafter, unable to find the required number of 'dangerous' internees required to fill the ships in time for tight departure dates, human cargoes constituted whichever internees were at hand. Thus, on the ill-fated *Arandora Star* there were some seven hundred Italians compared to less than five hundred 'A' category Germans. The most flagrant breach of the policy to only transport those posing an immediate threat in case of invasion was in the loading of the *Dunera*, where ninety percent of its passengers were 'B' and 'C' category Germans and Italians.⁴⁵

The quality of accommodation on each ship varied dramatically. One internee described how on board the *Ettrick* the lowest four decks of the ship were filled with internees on one side and German POWs on the other, with only airshafts connecting them with the upper decks. The experience of being separated 'by a thin strand of wire from hundreds of highly trained, effective, and obviously fanatic Nazis for almost ten days was distinctly unnerving'.⁴⁶ One thing in common on all the ships was the lack of adequate sleeping quarters and sanitary arrangements for the internees, who were crammed into spaces designed for a much smaller number of passengers.⁴⁷ The conditions on the *Dunera* were widely accepted to be the worst of all the transports. In addition to the terrible conditions, the British soldiers on board pilfered everything of value from their passengers including 1,200 watches and hundreds of gold wedding rings.⁴⁸ The majority of the internees had only escaped from

44 The number of internees placed on ships was actually 400 greater than the number of individuals transported as the 444 survivors of the *Arandora Star* deemed fit enough to travel were placed on the *Dunera* and shipped to Australia (Stent, *Bespattered*, p. 97).

45 Figures from the Paterson Report as quoted by Stent, *Bespattered*, pp. 96–7.

46 Lynton, M., *Accidental Journey: A Cambridge Internee's Memoir of World War II* (Woodstock: Overlook, 1995), p. 33.

47 The *Dunera*, for example, was designed for 1,600 passengers including crew, yet 2,732 internees were sent aboard, excluding guards and crew; see Pearl, C., *The Dunera Scandal: Deported by Mistake* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1983), p. 19; Helman, S., "The Dunera Boys," *The National Library Magazine* no. June (2010): 3–7, p. 3. Sleeping on the floor was the norm on all transport ships.

48 Patkin, B., *The Dunera Internees* (Stanmore, NSW, Australia, 1979), p. 37. One internee noted that 'On the boat luggage was strewn about and open cases everywhere looted by the soldiers.' (Baruch, "Reminiscences"). Another remembered "The suitcases were opened forcefully by soldiers. Many things, sometimes everything were

continental Europe with minimal possessions, and often these were of significant sentimental value. To have these lost to the avarice of these soldiers added to the grief of the situation.

The true tragedy, however, was the *Arandora Star*, which was torpedoed and sunk in the early hours of July 2, 1940, with the loss of over 650 lives. None of the transport ships were marked as carrying POWs. Instead they set sail unaccompanied, equipped with anti-submarine guns, and employed a zigzag pattern in their movements, making the ships obvious targets for German U-boats.⁴⁹ Had some safety precautions been taken, it is possible that many more individuals would have survived. As it was, 'many people, especially sick and older ones, and those from the lower part of the ship could not reach the open decks,' and therefore had no chance of survival.⁵⁰

The Canadian and Australian governments had been prepared to accept some of Britain's most dangerous POWs. The reception the survivors received upon their arrival in their host country was therefore far from welcoming. One internee remembered that: 'throughout our stay in Canada, that POW delusion was never cleared up, nor was the public amazement that so motley a crowd could ever have had any military impact — the conquest of France, no less!'⁵¹ While the Canadians never overcame the misunderstanding, however, the Australians soon entered into a more casual attitude with their charges, quickly realising they were not the 'Nazi parachutists whom they had been led to expect.'⁵²

In both Canada and Australia conditions were primitive and it took some time to get provisions beyond basic food means.⁵³ Something the

taken out, put into the pocket or thrown overboard' (Helman, "Dunera", p. 3). The aggressive nature of the guards was toned down for the television mini-series 'The Dunera Boys,' broadcast in 1985, and yet still made for uncomfortable viewing (Lang, B., 'The Dunera Boys: Dramatizing History from a Jewish Perspective,' in Dove, R. (ed.), *"Totally Un-English"? Britain's Internment of "Enemy Aliens" in Two World Wars* (New York: The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies Vol. 7, 2005), p. 183).

49 The boats were 'sinister like...veritable coffin[s]' (Fehle, B., "Memorandum relating to the Disaster of the SS Arandora Star." 1940, MS 09647). See also Balestracci, M.S., *Arandora Star: From Oblivion to Memory* (Parma: MUP, 2008).; and Baruch "Reminiscences".

50 Fehle, "Memorandum".

51 Lynton, *Accidental*, p. 38. The mislabelling of internees as POW's led to 'a profound identity crisis' (Brunnhuber, N.M.T., 'After the Prison Ships: Internment Narratives in Canada,' in *"Totally Un-English"? p. 169*).

52 Stent, *Bespattered*, p. 230.

53 For example, there was no paper or ink for writing letters to relatives initially in Australian camps, see Baruch, "Reminiscences". Replacing items like spectacles could also be a problem as it was not seen as 'high priority' by some Canadian Camp Commandants. See HO 215/161 Canada: B and C category internees.

internees were extremely thankful for, despite the climatic issues of their new homes, was the quality of the food available. After the problems of the previous camps and the lack of edible food available on board transport ships, the internees could not believe that they could receive 'fresh butter, milk, sugar, fresh vegetables, and fruit, marmalade, jam, eggs, [and] fresh meat' as part of their rations.⁵⁴ Fresh fruit and vegetables were available in abundance once the internees started gardening. In fact, many more opportunities for farming and animal husbandry were available in Australia than in Britain for the internees, and soon arrangements were made for orthodox Jews to have kosher food.⁵⁵ Much like the camps on the Isle of Man, the internees worked hard to create their own artistic and musical entertainments, as well as forming essential services such as administrations, hospitals, and canteens.⁵⁶

Internment in Great Britain for the majority was over in eighteen months. Almost as soon as the internees had made their temporary homes on the Isle of Man, Australia, and Canada, it was possible to apply for release. White Papers were circulated from July 1940 detailing categories for release such as serving in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, or in other professions that would help the British war effort.⁵⁷ Release was a time consuming and often frustrating business, but eventually all but those considered the most serious threat were released and were able to continue with their lives or start new ones.⁵⁸ Upon release the former internees did their utmost to put the experience behind them and there have never been any formal reunions, though in recent years some individuals have revisited the Isle of Man and documented their experience.⁵⁹ In general, documentation of the memories of the former internees began in the late 1970s/early 1980s, linking to a resurgence of interest in the treatment of refugees during the war that included the rediscovery of the story of the *Kindertransport*.

Since the resurgence of interest in the 1980s there have been multiple publications on the subject in both an academic as well as a popular context. A handful of novels have been written, for example, including

54 Baruch, "Reminiscences".

55 Stent, *Bespattered*, pp. 232–5.

56 *Ibid.* See also Barker, F.A., "Letter of thanks for medical care given by Dr Patrick Peel to internees." 1945, MS 12380; Helman, "Dunera", pp. 4-5.

57 Hellmuth Weissenborn Interview; "Fiala Correspondence"; IWM, "Ludwig Spiro Interview", 1979.

58 Stent, *Bespattered*, pp. 213-4/238-9. HO 213/7 The internment of citizens of friendly nations (1942). See also Koch, E., *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder* (London: Methuen, 1980).

59 Such as Jochanan, "Inside Out"; and Lustig, F., "Memories, Memories..." *AJR* Nov (2014).

Francine Stock's *A Foreign Country*, published in 1999 and David Baddiel's *The Secret Purposes*, published in 2004.⁶⁰ The message of these novels is that all those involved in internment, regardless of which side of the barbed wire they were on, suffered emotionally. The subject of internment has also been mentioned in many popular television shows though only one television production has been made solely about internment — *The Dunera Boys*, an Australian drama starring Bob Hoskins, produced in 1985.⁶¹

Overall, internment was a negative experience for the refugees who had fled to safety in Britain only to be placed behind barbed wire. While the refugees retained their belief in British fair play and expected to be released, what troubled them was not knowing which way the war would turn. Had Britain been invaded the internees would have been unable to escape. This has led to a certain ambivalence in the memory of the camps that has altered over the passage of time. Helmuth Weissenborn could not 'remember a more depressing time but I don't blame anyone for that.'⁶² Herbert Loebel said that 'I found the time I spent in internment not without interest.'⁶³ However, his father, Robert Loebel 'was very bitter about being interned at all.'⁶⁴ Despite the conflicting emotions of the former internees there is a sentiment that Britain did what was necessary in a time of war. The experience was one more hurdle for the internees to overcome. Steven Vajda, formerly of Sefton Camp, recalled

I could not help but reflect on my arrest in Giessen and subsequent transport to Buchenwald 18 months earlier and the difference between the horror then and the gentlemanly procedure now. I, personally, unlike some others, quite understood the motive for internment but deplored the mindless, ignorant, reaction and lack of knowledge and judgement of officialdom (by depriving the country, inter alia, of valuable skilled labour for the war effort).⁶⁵

60 Baddiel, D., *The Secret Purposes* (London: Little, Brown & Company, 2004); Stock, F., *A Foreign Country* (London: Chatto & W, 1999). Natasha Solomons' 2010 book takes inspiration from the guidance offered to refugees on their arrival in Great Britain and touches on internment in her description of the trials and tribulations of a German refugee in his lifelong attempts to gain British acceptance (Solomons, N., *Mr Rosenblum's List: Or Friendly Guidance for the Aspiring Englishman* (London: Sceptre, 2010)).

61 For example, internment has featured in *Who Do You Think You Are?* (2004), *Great British Railway Journeys* (2012), and an episode of *Foyle's War* (2002).

62 Helmuth Weissenborn Interview. Another internee was glad to 'see the back of this place' (Levy, J., "English exercise book of Josef Levy." 1940s, MS 09401).

63 "Information relating to internees F S Loebel, Robert Loebel, and Herbert Loebel." 1940, 2008, MS 12197

64 *Ibid.*

65 Steven Vajda Interview.

For those interned on the Isle of Man there was no ill treatment, even if the food and living conditions left something to be desired. The most unpleasant memories stemmed from the initial arrests, poorly equipped and insanitary transit camps, and overcrowded and thoroughly unpleasant journeys to Australia and Canada. Those who remember internment with the most anger are those affected by the tragedy of the sinking of the *Arandora Star*.

The bodies of the victims from the *Arandora Star* washed ashore across Northern Island and Scotland, including the Isle of Colonsay, one of the Inner Hebrides.⁶⁶ Memorials commemorating the disaster have been created throughout the British Isles. The Anglo-Italian community has never forgotten the devastation caused by the unnecessary loss of their loved ones. In recent years social media has been used to campaign for an official apology.⁶⁷ The *Arandora Star*, controversial at the time, remains a highly emotive event and the only aspect of internment that has never been truly resolved.

Significantly, the creative endeavours of the internees that served to protect them emotionally during their ordeal have also been the most important form of communicating the memory of internment. Art is a powerful way to engage the public in this portion of history. Kurt Schwitters, for example, perhaps the most famous of the interned artists, has been the subject of several exhibitions in recent years including the 'Schwitters in Britain' exhibition at Tate Britain.⁶⁸ An entire room at the Tate exhibition was devoted to Hutchinson camp, bringing thousands of individuals into contact with the subject. The work of artists interned on the Isle of Man has also been commemorated via the postal service in 2010 with the release of a special set of stamps.

In conclusion then, the memory of internment in Britain, although present in the lives of the former internees, has only begun to re-enter public consciousness in the last twenty-five years. Since the initial burst in historical scholarship, further Government files have been released for perusal at the National Archives in Kew. However, records are still incomplete and stories of internment continue to surface. For the majority of those interned it was primarily a benign though unpleasant experience,

66 Balestracci, *Arandora Star*. See also the information on the Colonsay website focusing on the tragedy <http://goo.gl/1eJnhM> [accessed 21/04/15].

67 "The Arandora Star Campaign for an Apology" <https://goo.gl/zrFgAR> [accessed 21/04/15]; "Arandora Star" <https://goo.gl/qgRbiL> [last accessed 21/04/15].

68 "Kurt Schwitters Exhibition curated by Professor Fran Lloyd" <http://goo.gl/ikL-Wvm> [accessed 21/04/15]; "Kurt Schwitters internment camp art exhibition opens" <http://goo.gl/BRsrCO> [accessed 21/04/15]; "Schwitters in Britain" <http://goo.gl/kmu-W3T> [accessed 21/04/15].

placed in the greater narrative of wartime survival and gratitude to Britain for giving asylum to refugees. Recently television, fiction, and art, has sparked the public imagination into life on this subject. The surviving family members of those lost on the *Arandora Star* are attempting to draw on the resurgence of interest in internment to bolster their appeal to the British government to apologise. Certainly the memory of the *Arandora Star* has never left the Anglo-Italian community and remains the most traumatic of the internment memories. Only time will tell as to whether the memory of internment for this group of survivors will be fully acknowledged and whether a public apology will be made.