Representing Prisoner of War Experience

One-day Interdisciplinary Conference in conjunction with War and Representation Network (WAR-Net)

University of Warwick, Saturday 9 November 2013
Humanities Building

http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/resrec/conferences/pow
The ‘Representing Prisoner of War Experience’ Conference has been organised by Elodie Duché and Grace Huxford (Warwick; POW Network) in conjunction with WAR-Net founders Professor Gill Plain (St. Andrews) and Dr. Kate McLoughlin (Birkbeck College, University of London).

We would like to thank all our sponsors for their funding of this event: the Royal Historical Society, Warwick History Department, the Humanities Research Centre, the Warwick Oral History Network and the Centre for the History of Medicine (Warwick) and to all those who have supported this event.

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**Cover Image**
Husain Quli presents prisoners of war from Lahore. Painting from the Akbarnama, 1590-1595. (V&A Collections).

The composition of this painting was designed by the Mughal court artist Basawan and was painted by Mansur, whose mastery in depicting animals is already apparent. It is the left side of a double-page composition (with IS.2:113-1896) illustrating the Akbarnama (Book of Akbar). It depicts the Mughal general Husain Quli Khan Jahan presenting his prisoners to the emperor Akbar (r.1556–1605) in 1572, after the victorious military campaign in Gujarat. The prisoners have been made to dress in animal skins to add to their humiliation and have chains around their necks.

The Akbarnama was commissioned by Akbar as the official chronicle of his reign. It was written in Persian by his court historian and biographer, Abu’l Fazl, between 1590 and 1596, and the V&A’s partial copy of the manuscript is thought to have been illustrated between about 1592 and 1595. This is almost certainly the earliest illustrated version of the text, and drew upon the expertise of some of the best royal artists of the time. Many of these are listed by Abu’l Fazl in the third volume of the text, the A’in-i Akbari, and their names appear in the V&A illustrations, written in red ink beneath the pictures, showing that this was a royal copy made for Akbar himself. After his death, the manuscript remained in the library of his son Jahangir, from whom it was inherited by Shah Jahan.

The V&A purchased the manuscript in 1896 from Frances Clarke, the widow of Major General John Clarke, who bought it in India while serving as Commissioner of Oudh between 1858 and 1862.
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Programme

0900 - 0930 Registration in Humanities Foyer

0930 - 0945 Introduction and announcements (H0.58) (Dr. Kate McLoughlin and Elodie Duché)

0945 - 1100 Keynote Lecture (H0.58): Professor Bob Moore (University of Sheffield)
‘The Past, Present and Future of Prisoner-of-War Studies’ Introduced by Elodie Duché

1100 - 1115 Tea/Coffee (Humanities Foyer)

1115 - 1230 Panel 1A (H0.58): Gendered Narratives of Captivity
Chair: Dr. Clare Makepeace

• Dr. Victoria Stewart (University of Leicester), ‘“Never tell my mother I have been in prison”: Female SOE Agents in Nazi Captivity’

• Dr. Matthias Reiss (University of Exeter), ‘Sex behind Barbed Wire: the Case of German POWs in the United States during World War Two’

• Professor Gill Plain (University of St. Andrews), ‘The “duty to escape”? Making a Man of the British POW’

1115 - 1230 Panel 1B (H0.60): Moral Duties and the Prisoner of War
Chair: Professor Bob Moore

• Barbie Thompson (Independent Researcher), ‘Captives and Captors Accounts of Confinement in Nineteenth-Century Devon’

• Dr. Erica Charters (University of Oxford), ‘Sentiment, Suffering and Public Opinion: Prisoners of War in Eighteenth Century’

• Dr. Betty Hagglund (University of Birmingham), ‘Seeing Through Two Different Lenses: German Prisoners and British Quakers on the Isle of Man during World War I’

1230 - 1330 Lunch (Humanities Foyer, H0.58 and H0.60)

1330-1445 Keynote Lecture (H0.58): Dr. Gilly Carr (University of Cambridge)
‘The Importance of Creativity Behind Barbed Wire’ Introduced by Grace Huxford
1445 - 1600 Panel 2A (H0.58): Collective Selves in Captivity Narratives

Chair: Dr. Erica Charters

- Lizzie Oliver (University of Leeds and Imperial War Museum), ‘The Haunting of the “FEPOW” Spirit: Politics and Postmemory in the Commemoration of the Far Eastern Prisoner of War’
- Dr. Clare Makepeace (Birkbeck College, University of London), ‘“ALL who were captured”? The evolution of national ex-prisoner of war associations in Britain after the Second World War’
- James Clark (York University, Toronto) ‘Citizenship, the state and narratives of captivity after 9/11’

1445-1600 Panel 2B (H0.68): Imprisonment in the First World War

Chair: Dr. Kate McLoughlin (Birkbeck College, University of London)

- Dr. Sandra Barkhof (University of Plymouth), ‘Renegotiating the Yellow Peril: Cultural and physical displacement in the German colony in China during the First World War’
- Dr. Edmund King (The Open University), ‘“The University of Mainz”: Reading and Writing behind the Wire in the First World War’
- J. Grant Repshire (University of Exeter and Gloucestershire Archives), ‘Representations of First World War POW Guilt through the Works and Papers of FW Harvey’

1600 - 1615 Tea/Coffee (Humanities Foyer)

1615-1730 Panel 3A (H0.58): “Creativity Behind Barbed Wire”

Chair: Dr. Victoria Stewart (University of Leicester)

- Stacey Nichola Barrett Astill (Newcastle University) - ‘Walking Backwards and the Klim Tin Handicap: an Exploration of Humour in Allied Second World War POW Literature’
- Dr. Gorka Mercero (University of Birmingham), ‘Jailed Ideas, Jailed Lives: Militancy and Self in Basque Writer Joseba Sarrionandia´s Poems from Prison’ (co-authored with Daniela Bister).
- Dr. Caroline Perret (University of Westminster), ‘Hans Bellmer, Max Ernst and Wols at the Camp des Milles (1939-40)’
1615-1730 Panel 3B (H0.60): Violence and Exploitation

Chair: Professor Gill Plain (University of St. Andrews)

- Sean McGlynn (University of Plymouth at Strode College), ‘Atrocity against Prisoners of War in the Age of Chivalry’
- Alan Malpass (Sheffield Hallam University), ‘“Slave Trading”? Conceptualizing Prisoner of War Labour in Britain c. 1939-48’
- Dr. James Goodchild (University of Plymouth), ‘Exploitation of European Refugees and Axis Prisoners of War in Britain, 1939-45’

1730 - 1830 Wine reception and closing remarks (Graduate Space, 4th Floor Extension)

*We warmly welcome delegates to attend an informal post-conference dinner from 1845 at on-campus restaurant Le Gusto Oven & Bar, Warwick Arts Centre (payment on an individual basis).*
Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

Keynote Lectures

Professor Bob Moore:

The Past, Present and Future of Prisoner-of-War Studies

Over the last twenty years, the academic attention afforded to prisoners-of-war during the Second World War has grown from warranting a few footnotes in military and social histories, to being recognised as an important topic in its own right. This increased interest was fostered by the growth in social-military history epitomised by the ground-breaking work of Christian Streit, whose 1980 monograph, Keine Kameraden, opened the door on the previously ignored elements of battlefield behaviour and the treatment of prisoners on the Eastern Front. However, it took some time before captivity was afforded its rightful place as one of the most common experiences for those involved in the conflict – either during hostilities or for millions of others when the war came to an end. This recognition, from political, social and some military historians has led to a steady stream of excellent publications that have reflected on different aspects of captivity in many different theatres of war – and has also led to investigations on prisoners in earlier conflicts. This welcome tendency will provide the opportunity for future comparative studies but will also provide additional research agendas that will serve to further integrate the political, social and military elements involved. While much has already been achieved, there are still major questions that need to be addressed by the next generation of scholars.

Professor Bob Moore is Professor of Twentieth Century European History at the University of Sheffield. He has published extensively on the history of Western Europe in the mid twentieth century, including Victims and Survivors: the Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940-1945 (1997), Crises of Empire: Decolonisation and Europe’s Imperial States (with Martin Thomas and Larry Butler, 2007), and Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States (with Frank Caestecker, 2009) His work on prisoners of war includes The British Empire and its Italian Prisoners of War 1940-47 (with Kent Fedorowich, 2003) as well as edited collections Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II (also with Kent Fedorowich, 1995) and Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace (with Barbara Hately Broad, 2005). His latest monograph, Survivors: Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe was published by Oxford in 2010 and he is currently working on a History of Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War.

Dr. Gilly Carr:

The Importance of Creativity Behind Barbed Wire

The outbreak of WWII took place 74 years ago. Those of us who study and work with groups of former POWs are only too aware that we work on the edge of living memory. Those who were adults during the war, and thus have the best understandings and memories of what they experienced, are now few and far between. Even children who were civilian internees are not
numerous. What will we do when oral testimony is no longer a resource? Can the POW experience be fully understood and recreated through log books, diaries and letters? Certainly our field will be much the poorer when there are no survivors left to answer new research questions. In this paper I explore the importance of other camp ‘ephemera’: the material culture, broadly described as the ‘arts and crafts’, which today are used principally to illustrate the written words and oral testimonies of life behind barbed wire. I explain why, far from being of merely illustrative value, camp-made material culture should move centre-stage in POW studies. Using archaeological approaches to material culture analysis, nuances and patterns emerge. The interpretation of these, currently, can be enriched by oral testimony. The understanding that this provides will, in the future, help cement in position the acknowledgement of the central importance of creativity behind barbed wire.

**Dr. Gilly Carr** is a Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Cambridge; she is also a Fellow and Director of Studies in Archaeology and Anthropology at St Catharine’s College. Her research interests are in Conflict Archaeology, POW Archaeology, and post-conflict heritage studies. Since 2006 she has been working with a group of civilian internees from the Channel Islands who were deported to Germany during WWII and has curated two museum exhibitions on their experiences at Guernsey and Jersey Museums in 2010 and 2012. She has co-edited, with Harold Mytum, *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire* (Routledge 2012) and *Prisoners of War: Archaeology, Memory and Heritage of 19th and 20th century mass internment* (Springer 2013). Her next monograph, *Legacies of Occupation* will be published in 2014.

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**Panel Speakers**

**Dr. Victoria Stewart (University of Leicester)**

*“Never tell my mother I have been in prison”: Female SOE Agents in Nazi Captivity*

The dominant image of the prisoner of war in British culture, conveyed in texts such as Eric Williams’s *The Wooden Horse* (1949) and Pat Reid’s *The Colditz Story* (1952), emphasises male communities and heroic escape attempts. Increasingly, however, the wartime plight of SOE agents captured in occupied Europe, many of them women, has been given renewed consideration, with correctives offered to accounts from the immediate postwar. This paper will address how, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, authors of biographies of female SOE agents attempted to encompass aspects of Nazi atrocities within narratives that are principally intended to laud individual heroism. I will consider the strategies employed by authors to give credibility to their accounts, a process complicated by the unreliability of available source material and by the fact that these authors are, in Dominick LaCapra terms, ‘secondary witnesses’, and, in some cases, are writing after the death of their subject. How did such atypical stories fit into existing and developing narratives of the prisoner of war? In many respects this is an account of absences and partially comprehended glimpses, echoing the situation of captured SOE agents, kept in concentration camps but sometimes in seclusion from other prisoners, their precise fates often unknown for many years.
Examining biographies that were published in the wake of postwar war crimes trials, I will situate them in relation to emergent discourse about ‘Nazi crimes’. I will argue that these texts reflect wider debates of the period about agency, responsibility and the relationship between the individual and the collective in wartime. Consideration will be given to Jerrard Tickell’s Odette: The Story of a British Agent (1949), Jean Overton Fuller’s Madeleine: The Story of Noor Inayat Khan (1952) and R. J Minney’s Carve her Name with Pride: The Story of Violette Szabo (1956).

**Dr. Victoria Stewart** is Reader in Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Leicester. *She has published widely on fictional and non-fictional writing from the First and Second World Wars, with books including Narratives of Memory: British Writing of the 1940s (2006) and The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories (2011).*

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**Dr. Matthias Reiss (University of Exeter)**

*Sex behind Barbed Wire: the Case of German POWs in the United States during World War Two*

Sexual activities behind barbed-wire remain one of the most understudied aspects of the POW experience in World War Two. While veterans generally acknowledge the existence of same-sex desire or intercourse behind barbed-wire, almost all of them claim that they have only heard about it and hardly anyone admits to personal experience in this field. Historians also usually deal with this topic in very general terms and argue that the peculiar living conditions in POW camps made, in A. J. Barker’s words, ‘a certain amount of homosexuality ... inevitable.’ (Behind Barbed Wire (London, 1974), p. 132). Most recently, Midge Gillies has claimed in a similar fashion that ‘too much time to think’ made it all too easy for Allied POWs to fall in love with a fellow prisoner (The Barbed-Wire University (London, 2011), p. 50). This paper will analyse how the issue of sexual desire and intercourse behind barbed-wire is discussed in the recollections of German veterans of World War Two. It will focus mainly, although not exclusively, on the experience of the over 371,000 German POWs in the United States using oral history interviews, unpublished recollections, published memoirs, POW personnel files and Army correspondence. It will discuss how the prisoners and the detaining power defined homosexual behaviour and argue that both sides framed it as a political as well as a medical problem rather than seeing it as the inevitable result of boredom, cramped living conditions and the absence of women. The paper will argue that the association of same-sex desire with political extremism and / or mental illness made it difficult for the veterans to talk about this aspect of captivity after the war even after homosexuality became de-criminalised in Germany.

**Dr. Matthias Reiss** is a Senior Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Exeter. *His research interests are the history of prisoners of war, street protest, unemployment, African American history and visual history. He has published widely on German prisoners of war in the United States during World War Two, including a monograph on the POWs’ relationship with African Americans (“Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde”: Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942–1946 (2002)). He has also edited The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century (2007) and co-edited Unemployment and Protest: New Perspective on Two Centuries of Contention (2011). Matthias Reiss is currently writing a monograph on the National League of the Blind, a trade union of blind workers in the UK, which will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2014.*
I am sure that the majority of the men who sought to escape did it for self-preservation. Instinctively, unconsciously, they felt that resignation meant not physical but mental death – maybe lunacy. (Pat Reid, The Colditz Story, 1952/2001: 38)

These words are a rare acknowledgement of the psychological reality of imprisonment. They stand at odds with the largely cheerful tone of Reid’s narrative, and with postwar cinematic reenactments of POW experience which stress that it is every man’s ‘duty to escape’ (The Wooden Horse). This potent phrase suggests both a morale-boosting fantasy of uninterrupted military agency, and a more disturbing disciplinary regime which complicates the already problematic condition of incarceration. Yet the duty to escape was not always seen as central to representations of POW existence, and tracing the emergence of this imperative across ten years of cinema offers insight into the (re)construction of British masculinity in the postwar period. This paper will focus on three films: The Captive Heart (1947), The Wooden Horse (1950) and The Colditz Story (1955). It will begin by examining the relationship between POW stories and conventional war films, and will argue that incarceration narratives are hybrid genres, indebted to the crime ‘capers’ and comedies that flourished in the postwar period. These generic tendencies raise questions about what stories it was possible to tell in the immediate postwar years, as does the progressive absence or tidy containment of emotion. Between 1947 and 1955, then, cinema moves from imagining the prisoner of war camp as a space of holistic reconstruction, and a site of communal resistance, to depicting it as a cross between Oxford and St Trinians. In the process, the impotence of incarceration is reinscribed as a narrative of heroic agency: not just the duty but the pleasure of escape.

Professor Gill Plain is Professor of English at the University of St Andrews and co-founder, with Kate McLoughlin, of WAR-Net. She works on war writing, crime fiction, British popular cinema, and theories of gender, and her publications include Women’s Fiction of the Second World War (1996), Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body (2001) and John Mills and British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation (2006). She has recently completed a new monograph, Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and ‘Peace’, published by EUP in 2013.

Barbie Thompson (Independent Researcher)

Captives and Captors Accounts of Confinement in Nineteenth-Century Devon

Plymouth was regularly the first port of call for vessels bringing POWs to England during the Napoleonic and American wars. Purpose built in 1695 Mill Prison and the aging hulks moored on the River Tamar were soon full to capacity. Opened in 1809, Dartmoor Prison in Devon took the overflow. This paper will focus on prisoner conditions; highlighting the differences a British politician and a naval surgeon endeavoured to bring to the well-being of prisoners, plus a vivid account of life aboard a prison hulk recorded by a non-combatant American passenger accused of breaking parole.
Barbie Thompson was born in Abergavenny but grew up and went to school in Plymouth, Devon and she considers herself a Plymothian. Barbie gained a scholarship to study commercial subjects, and her subsequent career in administration and as a PA took her to London, the Middle East and North Africa, returning to England in 2000 and back to her roots in Devon. Since 2005 Barbie has been working as a volunteer researcher as part of the U3A Shared Learning Group with Plymouth Museum. This has allowed her to resume a childhood fascination with history. As a consequence she has developed a series of papers relating to Plymouth and the West Country’s maritime history during the 18th and early 19th Century. Her presentations at the Museum’s lunchtime talks are popular, and her findings have been shared with local community groups. In March 2010 Barbie presented her paper on “Mill Prison – A Century of Captives & Captors” at ‘The Plymouth History & Archives Day Conference’ sponsored by Friends of Devon’s Archives & Devon Family History Society. In April 2011, she was booked as guest speaker to discuss her paper “Captain Edward Hawkins: Superintendent of the Prisons Ships on the Hamoaze” at the ‘Hulks Study Day’, sponsored by the SE Group of the 1805 Club at Rochester Guildhall Museum in Kent. Following that success Barbie has widened her audience by speaking at various UK Conferences at University level – Exeter, Oxford and London. As a result of the International Conference on the War of 1812 held at London University in July 2012, Barbie was invited to present her paper on ‘The Role of Plymouth and Dartmoor during the War of 1812’ at another International Conference concerning that war which was fought between America, Britain and Canada. This conference was held at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis in June 2013. She has also been invited to return to St Anne’s College, Oxford to present her recent paper on ‘Intrigue and Collusion at Prisoner of War Depots and Naval Dockyards’ in September 2013.

Dr. Erica Charters (University of Oxford)

Sentiment, Suffering and Public Opinion: Prisoners of War in Eighteenth Century

The escalation of Franco-British imperial warfare during the eighteenth century resulted in a notable increase in the number of prisoners of war and the duration for which they were held. Whereas the wars of the early eighteenth century recorded 2-3,000 prisoners held for a maximum of 12 months, by the Seven Years War (1756-63) more than 20,000 French and Spanish prisoners captured around the globe were being held in Britain and its colonial ports for years at a time. This necessitated the development of formal European procedures regarding the treatment accorded to such prisoners. At the same time, new debates emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century over what constituted ‘humane’ treatment. This terminology was applied to the treatment of prisoners of war, becoming central to wartime rhetoric and propaganda. The treatment of prisoners played a particularly prominent role during the War of American Independence (1775-1783), when it was used to criticize British imperial rule as tyrannical, unjust, and immoral. This paper examines accounts of French, British, and American prisoner of war experiences during the mid and later eighteenth century, tracing how prisoner care became a central element of public opinion and debate. Tied to the development of first-person sentimental narratives in the late eighteenth century, prisoner of war accounts became particularly effective during and after the American War of Independence at mobilizing public opinion against British rule, and continue to do so today. Comparing prisoner care and accounts from the preceding Seven Years War with those of the American War reveals how new narrative styles and romantic sensibilities combined to bolster age-old rhetorical attacks against enemy armies and governments.
Dr. Erica Charters is University Lecturer in the History of Medicine at the University of Oxford (Faculty of History). Her research examines disease, state power, warfare, and how these intersect in the eighteenth century, especially in colonial contexts. More broadly, she is interested in the relationship between war and civil society during the early modern period, and co-edited the volume Civilians and War in Europe, 1618-1815 (LUP, 2012). She is currently researching the legal, ethical, and social contexts of prisoners of war during the eighteenth century, and French responses to disease during the Seven Years War (1756-63).

Dr. Betty Hagglund (University of Birmingham)

Seeing Through Two Different Lenses: German Prisoners and British Quakers on the Isle of Man during World War I

At the beginning of World War I, there were approximately 60,000 Germans living in Britain. Within a few weeks of the war starting, the British Government began arresting male Germans and Austrians of military age, interning them in camps. By the end of September, there were 13,600 internees, of whom 10,500 were civilians. British Quakers were deeply involved with the camps and the prisoners from the very beginning. They collected games, material for making clothing, books and handicraft equipment; they established craft workshops; they visited internees. They learned Christmas carols in German and organised Christmas trees, presents and festivities. They created networks of support for prisoners’ families, and worked closely with a German group providing similar assistance to British prisoners in German camps. Regular reports of Quaker involvement with the camps were produced and published in The Friend and the archives at Friends House include photographs, letters, reports and artefacts representing the Quaker side of the story. At the same time, a large collection of photographic negatives, commissioned by the prisoners for use as souvenir postcards survives in the archives of the camp at Douglas and there are a number of published and unpublished accounts of life in the camps. This paper, which forms part of a larger project on ‘Quaker Aspects of World War I’, focuses on the Isle of Man camps and explores the differing representations of camp life created by the prisoners and by their visiting ‘Friends’.

Dr. Betty Hagglund is a lecturer and supervisor at the Centre for Postgraduate Studies, University of Birmingham. She is Project Leader of the ‘Quaker Aspects of World War I’ project, a funded project bringing together academics and community/faith organisations, including mounting a major exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in early 2015. Outside of WWI, her main research areas are travel writing and print culture and she has published widely on both.

Lizzie Oliver (University of Leeds and Imperial War Museum)

The Haunting of the “FEPOW” Spirit: Politics and Postmemory in the Commemoration of the Far Eastern Prisoner of War

Men who were prisoners of the Japanese during the Second World War are popularly known as ‘FEPOW’ – Far Eastern Prisoners of War. However prisoners from other theatres of captivity or conflicts are not historically provided such specific collective references. Nonetheless, there is a
‘FEPOW’ prayer, as well as a ‘FEPOW’ motto – to ‘keep going the spirit which kept us going’. But how did the cultural figure of the ‘FEPOW’ evolve? And as time passes, has its meaning changed – and how? In this paper I show that the ‘FEPOW’ acronym was not typically used by the men themselves, at least until later years – and only then predominantly for political reasons rather than social identification. Groups of men returning from the Far East began to form local clubs, to help support one another through the aftermath, and to maintain the comradeship formed in prison camps. To offer a representative voice to government for these local groups, the National Federation of Far Eastern POW Clubs and Associations was established in 1952, campaigning for compensation and holding an annual remembrance service for 46 years. With success for the campaign and inevitably dwindling numbers of surviving ex-POWs, the Federation wound down and its functions of support and commemoration have been incorporated into the work of the charity COFEPOW (Children of Far Eastern POWs). I therefore show that once an active force for political lobbying, the ‘FEPOW’ is now adopted by relatives as a potent signifier for postmemory. Drawing on the extensive archives of Harold Payne – the Federation’s chairman for thirty years – I trace how the ‘spirit’ of the ‘FEPOW’ has morphed over the decades, reflecting not just camp survival and political and personal remembrance, but offering a symbol for the transgenerational ‘haunting’ of the ‘FEPOW’ manifest in families today.

Lizzie Oliver is a PhD student at the University of Leeds and Imperial War Museum, funded by an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award. Her thesis is focused on analysing the diaries, oral histories and memoirs produced by men who were Prisoners of War (POW) forced to labour on the Sumatra Railway during the Second World War. She is particularly interested in the legacy of ‘silenced’ or ‘forgotten’ histories, the relationships between autobiographical and historical narratives, and the memory (and postmemory) of those experiences among families.

Dr. Clare Makepeace (Birkbeck College, University of London)

For ‘ALL who were captured’? The evolution of national ex-prisoner of war associations in Britain after the Second World War

As cultural historians have increasingly acknowledged, the experience of war did not end with the signing of instruments of surrender, yet the memory of captivity is an unexplored theme in histories written on the experiences of British prisoners of war (POWs) in the Second World War. This paper focuses on one vehicle of memory, ex-prisoner of war associations, which have affected both how individual servicemen retrospectively made sense of their experiences of captivity, and have served to shape the national, collective memory of imprisonment. I will explore ex-POW associations from the establishment of the first national ‘Returned British Prisoners-of-War Association’ (RBPOWA) in August 1945 through to those associations that are still in existence today. Through an analysis of the evolution of these associations, this paper argues that whilst Far East POWs (FEPOWs) established a single, successful lobbying group, the voice of prisoners held in Germany and Italy has been fragmented by the diversity of conditions and treatment that was experienced in various POW camps, as well as the pull of pre-war and armed service identity. It also shows how the attempts of POWs held in Germany and Italy to form a single voice in the more recent past have been influenced and overshadowed by the narratives of suffering and victimhood, developed in the 1980s, and which are most commonly associated with FEPOWs.
Since public remembrance and affirmation are important for helping veterans cope with their past, in enabling them to talk about their wars, this paper will conclude by suggesting the inability of British POWs, held in Germany and Italy, to find a clear place or role in the narrative of the Second World War has deprived them of the ability to make sense of what they actually went through.

**Dr. Clare Makepeace** recently completed her thesis on the subjectivities of British prisoners of war held in Germany and Italy during the Second World War. It is the first cultural history to be written on this aspect of wartime imprisonment and Clare explores how these POWs made sense of their experiences of captivity at three different stages of their lives: whilst in captivity, upon their return from it and, at a point much later, after they had again become civilians. Clare has previously published on the relationships between British POWs and their loved ones at home, masculinity and prostitution during the First World War, and eugenics and feminism in the interwar years. For two years, Clare has also taught British history since 1750 at Birkbeck College, University of London.

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**James Clark (York University, Toronto)**

**Citizenship, state and narratives of captivity after 9/11**

Since the start of the US-led War on Terror, Western governments have been forced to respond to the increasingly frequent abduction of their own citizens in war zones. In Canada, a body of texts has emerged that document these experiences of captivity, which contribute to a shift in the conception of “prisoner of war” – from its legal definition under the Geneva Conventions, to its re-invention as “unlawful combatant” to describe detainees at Guantánamo Bay, to its contested application to Western Muslims facing extraordinary rendition. Similarly, these texts produce contradictory images of the Canadian state in its inconsistent defence of citizenship rights after 9/11. In two of these texts – *Under an Afghan Sky: A Memoir of Captivity* (2011) by Mellissa Fung and *Captivity: 118 Days in Iraq and the Struggle for a World Without War* (2011) by James Loney – the authors recount their own experiences of abduction by non-state actors. Although Fung and Loney criticize Canadian foreign policy, their narratives nevertheless depict the state as liberal and benevolent. By contrast, three other texts – *Dark Days: The Story of Four Canadians Tortured in the Name of Fighting Terror* (2008) by Kerry Pither, *Hope and Despair: My Struggle to Free My Husband, Maher Arar* (2008) by Monia Mazigh, and *Guantanamo’s Child: The Untold Story of Omar Khadr* (2008) by Michelle Shephard – depict the state as reactionary and oppressive, for its complicity in its citizens’ experiences of extraordinary rendition or capture as prisoners of war. Unlike Fung’s and Loney’s texts, these are not written by those actually held captive (all of them Canadian Muslims), but by allies who advocated for their release. This paper will address questions of race, ethnicity and religion – especially Islam – as they relate to modern conceptions of citizenship, and the contradictory ways that captivity narratives depict the state after 9/11.

**James Clark** is a PhD candidate in English at York University in Toronto, Canada. His dissertation is on Canadian war writing after 9/11, which focuses on texts that document the experiences of Canadian participants in the War on Terror and that contribute to contemporary discourses about Canada and war. Mostly memoirs by soldiers and journalists, these texts deal primarily with Canada’s role in the Afghan mission and make frequent appeals to familiar myths about national identity – in particular,
Canada as peacekeeper. They also demonstrate a link between popular conceptions of Canada and longstanding foreign policy positions of the Canadian government: especially captivity narratives that document Canadians’ experiences during the War on Terror of being abducted, detained, imprisoned or deported by extraordinary rendition. James is also a civil liberties activist based in Toronto, and a member of the steering committee of the Canadian Peace Alliance, Canada’s largest umbrella peace organization.

Dr. Sandra Barkhof (University of Plymouth)

‘Renegotiating the Yellow Peril: Cultural and physical displacement in the German colony in China during the First World War’

This paper will examine the cultural and physical displacement of German colonists in China during WW1, and is based on a chapter in the forthcoming edited volume ‘War and Displacement in the Twentieth Century’ (Eds: S.Barkhof and A.K. Smith). Japan occupied the German colony in China from November 1914. Their victory and subsequent occupation marked for many Germans living there a reversal of the common pre-war attitudes towards Japan, often framed in terms of racial-cultural ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’. This chapter will present an analysis of primary sources relating to German PoW and civilians from this colony, and the impact of war on their attitudes to Japan and the Japanese.

Dr. Sandra Barkhof is a Lecturer in Modern History at Plymouth University. She teaches nineteenth and twentieth century German and Japanese history. Her research focuses on the German colonies in China and the Pacific during the First World War, the German PoW in Japan, as well as German civilian internees in Australia and New Zealand.

Dr. Edmund King (The Open University)

“The University of Mainz”: Reading and Writing behind the Wire in the First World War

In August 1917, Alec Waugh—then barely 19—made his debut as a novelist. The Loom of Youth, an expose of student life based on Waugh’s experiences at Sherborne School, was an immediate sensation. By the time the book’s bestseller status was clear, however, Waugh was in Germany, having been captured during the 1918 German Spring Offensive. Taken to Karlsruhe and then Mainz, Waugh soon discovered that he was not the only author—or would-be author—among the British officers with whom he shared these captive spaces. At Karlsruhe he met, among others, the novelist Hugh Kingsmill Lunn, the actor and parodist James Milton Hayes, and the future BBC producer and poet Lance Sieveking. When all of these prisoners were transferred to Mainz citadel in May 1918, they formed the core of an active—and highly self-aware—literary community, centred upon the collection of books Lunn brought with him from Karlsruhe. Although clearly more privileged than prisoners captured from the ranks, the officers confined in Mainz citadel in 1918 were also subject to what would later be known as “barbed wire disease.” Lacking privacy, they were, as A. L. Vischer wrote of the syndrome, “continually thrown back upon the same companions, from whom there is no escape.” Asserting a literary vocation and identity offered one way of countering the ill effects of this forced companionship. In this paper, I will draw on the memoirs and diaries of Mainz inmates—
as well as articles and sketches in the camp magazine, The Queue—to ask how this coterie functioned, and the ways in which it enabled its members to gain agency over time and space within the prison. Finally, I will trace the impact of the social and literary networks formed in prison camp on the post-war lives of its members.

**Dr. Edmund King** is a postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of English at The Open University, where he works on the Reading Experience Database. His current research project centres on reading practices in the First World War, particularly those of captured British and Australian soldiers. His most recent publication is “‘Books Are More to Me Than Food’: British Prisoners of War as Readers, 1914-18,” Book History 16 (2013): 247-72.

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**Dr. Caroline Perret (University of Westminster)**

*Hans Bellmer, Max Ernst and Wols at the Camp des Milles (1939-40)*

The paper will look at the artistic production of Hans Bellmer, Wols, and Max Ernst, who were incarcerated at the Camp des Milles in the South of France from the autumn of 1939 to June 1940. In the context of the Vichy regime and collaboration, the study of the organisation of this camp will show an evolution of its function, from internment camp which rounded up and screened “civilian enemy aliens”, to transit camp from November 1940 to July 1942, and then deportation camp to death camps. Such an evolution is reflective of more general changes in the historical and political background of the period which will be examined. The paper thus inscribes itself within a revisionist view of French history during WWII, questioning in particular the mythologizing of the Vichy period. In this perspective, supported by actual administrative documents from the Camp des Milles which has recently become a Memorial Site, I wish to show that the camp was part of the organisation of an ensemble of camps and annexes by the military administration of the Third Republic, which would eventually become tools in the xenophobic, racist and totalitarian theories of the Fascist French State. As far as the artists are concerned, they were well established before their internment, involved with dada and Surrealism, as well as the famous Bauhaus school. Their artistic production at the Camp des Milles share common themes - a life in limbo, the sense of losing one’s identity, the lack of freedom, love, hygiene, and food – and common genres, in particular the one of portraiture in which the distress of comrades is shown and allegorical figures are used to attempt to express and make sense of the world around. However, far from attempting to find a common aesthetic between these artists which could have been triggered by the similarity of their circumstances, the paper will focus on their individual strategies with a close visual analysis of some of their work. Some present imaginary worlds in which the lines of delicately stylised creatures disintegrate to echo the destruction and degeneration when confronted to the reality of the experience of living in a camp. All artistic production become testimonies and traces of history, and show their creators’ opposition to barbarism, their denunciation of fanaticism and exclusion, but also their affirmation of individual freedom and hope in the face of adversity.

**Dr. Caroline Perret** is currently Research Associate for the Group for War and Culture Studies at the University of Westminster, and researches the impact of war on cultural production. She is particularly interested in art, illustrated books, literature, films and poetry in the historical, political, social, and cultural context of WWII in France.
J. Grant Repshire (University of Exeter and Gloucestershire Archives)

"Representations of First World War POW Guilt through the Works and Papers of FW Harvey"

Lieutenant Frederick William Harvey was among the famous poets of the Great war. He is unique among them as the only war poet to be published by a major publisher while concurrently a POW. Much of the poetry in his collection Gloucestershire Friends: Poems from a German Prison Camp deals with the experience of being a POW. After the war, he wrote a memoir titled Comrades in Captivity, documenting his life in the seven different Offizier-gefangenlagers (officer POW camps) that he was held in. His POW time is also represented in newly discovered, and heretofore unstudied, documents, including an unpublished semi-autobiographical novel, recently made available through a permanent loan of his personal papers to the Gloucestershire Archives. These papers are being catalogued and preserved through a University of Exeter REACT PhD studentship, for which I am the appointed researcher. This paper analyses how Harvey depicted his POW experience through a combination of his published poetry and prose, and unpublished works and letters from his papers. Particular emphasis will be placed on the feelings of guilt POWs felt knowing that their former front-line comrades were still fighting while they, as prisoners, were relatively safe. This was compounded by fear that those at home would see POWs as 'shirkers'. Harvey’s own guilt as a POW was compounded when his brother was killed in action in France. We can see representations of guilt in Harvey's poetry, and some superficial references to it in his memoirs. However, his unpublished novel offers further insight into this guilt. For example, in it he rewrites history to place himself fighting side-by-side with his brother at the time of his brother's death before being captured. My paper will use Harvey's words to explore the often overlooked emotional scars that POWs suffered during the Great War.

J. Grant Repshire (MA, Exon), Kansas native Grant Repshire received a bachelor's degree in history at the University of Kansas in 2005. Following graduation he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army. Trained as a cavalry officer and paratrooper, he was assigned to the famed 82nd Airborne Division, seeing active service in Iraq and Afghanistan. He left the army in late 2010 at the rank of Captain. In 2013 he received an MA in history from the University of Exeter, and is now studying at Exeter for a PhD in English through a REACT studentship 'The Papers of FW Harvey'.

Stacey Nichola Barrett Astill (Newcastle University)

"Walking Backwards and the Klim Tin Handicap: an Exploration of Humour in Allied Second World War POW iterature"

This paper will focus on the use of humour in the writings and memoirs of Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) in the European theatre during the Second World War. In order to explore this topic I will study ex-POWs’ memoirs, diaries and letters. It draws on oral testimony from interviews with ex-POWs as well as contemporary and modern news articles, surviving camp newspapers, memoirs and letters to demonstrate that humour is an integral part of Allied POW narrative. Most memoirs have at least some humour in them, and many interviewees focus on the humorous aspects of imprisonment, only touching lightly on the negatives. POWs developed theatre productions, interest groups and other activities to keep themselves entertained while suffering boredom in camps.
Humour was an integral part of this - satirical camp newspapers were posted daily and many of the plays (including Wonder Bar in Chungkai) were humorous in nature. Humour produced a façade, detracting from isolation and hopelessness. Many POWs write about the issues of mental health, referring becoming “Stalag Loopy” or “Barbed Wire Madness” and talk about the benefit of social interaction. This use of humour bleeds into the written accounts of camp life and continues to offer a defence mechanism. Humour was also used as a display of resistance in camps and it is common that POW memoirs maintain this humour. If one undertakes resistance with humour, it is harder to respond harshly as violent action seems irrational and disproportionate. This is evidenced in POW memoir literature with occurrences such as the beard growing contests held by prisoners when their shaving privileges were removed as a punishment. Writing in a humorous tone is also resistance, by commenting on experiences in an entertaining manner POWs remain defiant. The humour in POW writing is a valuable insight into their existence.

Stacey Astill is studying for a PHD (on the use of space, place and objects in POW camps) at the Centre for Manx Studies on the Isle of Man, Liverpool University.

Dr. Gorka Mercero (University of Birmingham)


Joseba Sarrionandia (Iurreta, 1958) is a Basque poet, novelist and essay-writer considered to be one of the best authors in contemporary Basque literature both by critics and readers in general. His literary career is a rarity as he has published most of his work from clandestine exile. At the age of 17 he joined the Basque independentist group ETA, and just three years after, in 1980, he was captured by the Spanish police and sent to jail under the accusation of having taken part in a case of kidnapping. In 1985, he broke out of prison hidden within a big loudspeaker that had been used for a concert at the premises. He has never returned to the Basque Country, not even after 2005, when his crimes prescribed under Spanish law. Whilst in prison, he kept writing and publishing, being one of the most representative works of that period his book of poems Kartzelako poemak (1992, Poems from Prison). In these poems, Sarrionandia shows a strong commitment to his political ideas, but opens up at the same time a space for a captivating lyricism that gives shape to a nude human figure. I would like to explore the coexistence of the political self and the private self in Sarrionandia’s experience in prison, the extent to which the first stands straight or yields to the latter, and the resulting combination of social/private traits in the model of politically committed individual that the book offers to an audience that was, at the time, largely expected to hold a strong nationalist ideology.

Dr. Gorka Mercero is Basque Language and Culture Tutor in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Birmingham. He holds a BA in Basque (University of the Basque Country, 2000), a MA in Critical and Cultural Theory (Cardiff University, 2004) and a PhD in Basque Studies (University of the Basque Country, 2012). His research focuses on the hypothesis that a change of worldview from Modernity to postmodernism/poststructuralism is taking place in contemporary Basque literature, involving most importantly new ways of understanding the nation. He is currently a member of the MHLI research group–Historical Memory in Iberian Literatures–, which analyses the representation in literature of historical events of the 20th and 21st centuries in the Iberian Peninsula.
Sean McGlynn (University of Plymouth at Strode College)

Atrocity against Prisoners of War in the Age of Chivalry

This paper would examine documented cases of extreme maltreatment of prisoners of war in the later Middle Ages, the supposed era of Chivalry. The chivalric code espoused the honourable treatment of fellow knights when captured; the knightly classes quite literally bought into this life insurance scheme, expecting to pay ransoms as the initial excess in exchange for safe return home. But while this worked as a general rule, time and again it failed, and knights were subjected to the same maltreatment as lower class prisoners (when the latter had not been killed outright). What caused this breakdown in the chivalric code? How did society record the atrocity and how did commentators judge it? What, in effect, did Chivalry mean for the experience of knightly prisoners? I will therefore show that Chivalry was not as effective as it is usually deemed in safeguarding the security of knightly prisoners, especially in the later Middle Ages. The paper will remind the audience that chivalry was above all a military code and as such was submissive to what I term the “military imperative” – the overwhelming necessity to secure victory at all cost. Thus examples of prisoners being killed will be discussed to reveal the brutal, rational thinking of commanders, many of whom were renowned – even after the event - for their chivalrous virtues. Violence against prisoners will also be discussed in light of their being coerced to write home urging payment of ransom. I will also discuss the impact of psychology and emotion (anger, violence, revenge, sadism) which led to maltreatment. In so doing, I will draw parallels with – and shed light on - the modern era (on which I have also written on) to show continuity in PoW experiences across the ages.

Sean McGlynn has written widely on the topic of maltreatment of prisoners, including By Sword and Fire: Cruelty and Atrocity in Medieval Warfare (2008), Blood Cries Afar: The Forgotten Invasion of England 1216 (2012) and, more recently, the 7,000 word entry on “War Crimes” for Wiley-Blackwell’s definitive Encyclopedia of War. He has just been commissioned to write Henry V and the Agincourt Massacre: The Limits of Chivalry in the Hundred Years War to mark the 600th anniversary of Agincourt in 2015. He is a lecturer for University of Plymouth at Strode College and Associate Lecturer at the Open University and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Alan Malpass (Sheffield Hallam University)

“Slave Trading”? Conceptualizing Prisoner of War Labour in Britain c. 1939-48

In July 1947, the British government was lambasted in the Manchester Guardian for ‘unworthily maintaining' a 'system of German slave-labour'. Unlike contemporary observations such as this, historians have yet to attempt a conceptualization of POW labour in Britain. Previous studies have emphasised the ‘substantial contribution’ made by Italian, and later German, POWs to the British economy -- particularly post-war agriculture. However, the form taken by POW labour as a system of servitude remains unquestioned. Contemplation of this is important, as the terminology chosen by historians has a direct influence on the way the POW experience is represented. This paper will conceptualize POW labour in Britain between 1939 and 1948 by drawing upon ideas of modern servitude including slavery, serfdom, indentured service, debt bondage and penal servitude; it will consider their common characteristics and the radical differences between them.
A range of contemporary perspectives held by different groups -- such as philanthropists and trade unionists -- will be examined in order to illustrate the multifaceted ways in which POW labour was, and can be, theorized. For example, while the government viewed it as a legitimate system of wartime penal servitude, the Save Europe Now movement considered the continued use of POW labour as an exploitative form of slavery. Consideration of these alternative views problematizes previous descriptions -- which have been drawn from governmental sources -- by revealing local complexities and diverse subjectivities. Arguably, POW labour in Britain did not take a distinct form; it shared features of several categories of unfree labour, fluctuating between a framework of indentured labour and penal servitude. Interrogating the concept of POW labour, will demonstrate the need to question terminology when reconstructing the POW experience. It is hoped that a theoretical approach will stimulate discussion to move beyond strictly empirical evaluations of POW labour.

Alan Malpass is a second-year History PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University. His research project aims to critically interrogate the interactions between British civilians and prisoners of war (POWs) in Britain between 1939 and 1948. His research attempts to expand the perspective, concentrating on the how POWs were interacted with outside the boundaries of the camp.

Dr. James Goodchild (University of Plymouth)

Exploitation of European Refugees and Axis Prisoners of War in Britain, 1939-45

There were many means of exploitation of European refugees and Axis POWs by the Allies during 1939–49. ‘Cooperative’ prisoners and German exiles were heavily utilised for their linguistic, scientific, or other academic abilities, as sources of intelligence, as hostages (or pawns), as stool pigeons, or as secret or double agents. In addition, before and throughout the Second World War, displaced civilians seeped into Britain as refugees (or aliens, or émigrés). Many volunteered or were compelled to assist the Allied cause: with language translation in naval, land, and air armed forces, with intelligence and secret agency, and/or with physical labour. This paper examines the many ways in which Axis POWs and European refugees were the subjects of exploitation in Britain. Much has been written about such matters, but almost always in isolation—for example the refugee scientists who assisted the Manhattan Project, or POWs used as a reserve labour force, as well as extraction of intelligence from POWs. Uniquely, this paper provides a comparative analysis of the various methods and forms of exploitation within the context of wartime internment policies and behaviour. Drawing from extensive archival research, the predominant argument throughout this paper is that such exploitation (compliant or otherwise) made a significant contribution to the Allied war effort and subsequent victory.

Dr. James Goodchild was recently awarded his doctorate at the University of Exeter with his thesis entitled ‘R. V. Jones and the Birth of Scientific Intelligence’. This research has reassessed the Second World War foundations of scientific and technical intelligence, and importantly contextualised these foundations into the wider structures of Allied science and intelligence organisation. He lectures modern history at both Plymouth and Exeter Universities, and his research interests are grounded in the inter-relationship between science, intelligence, war, and the state.

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