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HERITAGE BRITAIN

How the British remember the past

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Editorial

Remembering the past

“Did we really send men to fight in that?” The famous line ascribed to the British staff officer, Sir Launcelot Kiggell, has often been evoked to describe the Battle of Passchendaele and how it is remembered in Britain, writes Nick Lloyd in the first article of this edition of *British Politics Review*. But as we approach the centenary of this battle that has come to symbolise the whole British World War 1 experience, Lloyd argues, there are good reasons to present a more nuanced picture than the traditional “tales of mud, blood and futility” which seem to dominate the UK government’s plans for the commemorations this year.

Taking Passchendaele as our point of departure, we ask the question: how do the British remember and commemorate the past, and for what purposes and in which context is the past invoked in current debates? Maggie Andrews charts the development of Remembrance Sunday and Poppy appeals as two of the most visual examples of Heritage Britain, arguing that both are surrounded by a degree of controversy. Steven Fielding looks at the use of the past for political purposes today, examining the cultural memory of Labour’s election victory in 1945 – the “socialist moment” in Britain in the view of many – while John Gardner examines the so-called “Peterloo Massacre” of 1819, an historical event that has come to epitomise government use of violence against peaceful protesters, and over which a battle was fought “to control and set the narrative of the event in the minds of the public” shortly afterwards.

Brian Goodey takes stock of the British “heritage industry”, charting its expansion from the 1950s to today, and asks the question of whether “authenticity” is giving way to “interpretation” and “experience” under the current pressure of market forces. Sian Nicholas, meanwhile, offers a critical review of the ways in which films and serialisations of World War Two have changed over time.

Perhaps history has never simply been “written by the winners”, despite the old saying. But in the present era of international turbulence, migration and globalisation, it is particularly interesting to see how the past is made into an object and asked to stand still. It will not.

Atle L. Wold & Øivind Bratberg (editors)

The remembrance poppy has been used since 1921 to commemorate military personnel who have died in war. It was inspired by “In Flanders Fields”, a poem written during the First World War by the Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae. Applied by the American Legion to commemorate American soldiers killed in that war (1914-1918), the poppy was soon adopted by military veterans’ groups in parts of the British Empire. In Britain, the red poppy is worn in the weeks before Remembrance Sunday. It is offered by the Royal British Legion and is also a means to support members and veterans of the British Armed Forces and their families today.

The Third Battle of Ypres: 100 years on.

by Nick Lloyd

2017 marks the centenary of the Third Battle of Ypres, more commonly known as Passchendaele, which has become synonymous with the futility and horror of the First World War. To commemorate the battle, the UK Government is planning a number of events. The first is a live performance that will retell the story of the battle in the Market Square, Ypres, on the evening on 30 July. The second is a ticket-only event at the CWGC Cemetery at Tyne Cot on the outskirts of Passchendaele village (now known as Passendale) the following day. A nationwide search for descendants of those who fought has also been completed and 4,000 people will make their way to Ypres. Of these, 200 will be specially selected to take part in a Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate on the evening of 30 July.

These events have been organised by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and although, as yet, we do not know exactly how they will unfold (and how the story of the battle will be interpreted), there seems to be a clear emphasis upon futility, horror and loss. 'Conditions at Passchendaele were so horrific that they define our collective memory of the First World War', records the government's official website. 'Bogged down by thick mud caused by heavy rain and bombardment, troops suffered heavy losses as they battled uphill to take the Passchendaele ridge. By 10 November 1917, the British eventually claimed a victory despite suffering huge losses for very little territorial gain.' The Culture Secretary, the Rt. Hon. Karen Bradley MP, has stated that 'As we continue to commemorate the centenary of the First World War, it is important that we remember the horrors of the battlefields of Ypres and honour the many who lost their lives.'

The emphasis upon the futility of the battle and its legendary mud is commonplace and unsurprising. Indeed, if any battle seems to sum up Britain's memory of the war, it is Passchendaele. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, called it 'the campaign of the mud' and historians have largely repeated his accusation that the battle was a great disaster that did nothing to bring the war to a successful conclusion. One of the most commonly recycled quotations from Passchendaele concerns the British staff officer, Sir Launcelot Kiggell, who asked, incredulously, 'did we really send men to fight in that?' upon seeing the Ypres battlefield. Although there are good grounds for believing that this anecdote never actually happened (or if it did Kiggell used a different phrase), it seems to sum up the dominant perception of the battle. How could such a terrible disaster have taken place?

The idea of a summer campaign in Flanders originated from the British Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, who wanted to seize the Channel ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge and to place the German Army under significant pressure in a vital sector of the Western Front. Haig believed that he could break the line, roll up the front, and win a major victory. He placed General Sir Hubert Gough, commander of the British Fifth Army, in charge and tasked him with breaking out of the Ypres Salient. Despite amassing an unprecedented array of artillery, Gough's attempt to drive through the German defensive system, which was deeply-layered and studded with almost invulnerable concrete blockhouses (known as pillboxes), proved beyond his powers. Although the initial attack met with some success, the tactics of the German defenders (with their emphasis upon defending in depth and making counter-attacks) were very difficult to deal with and the British struggled to make significant progress throughout August. They were not helped with the heavy rainfall, which broke on the first day of the battle and continued, with only temporary stoppages, throughout the following month, turning the battlefield in a waterlogged morass.



German prisoners and British wounded cross the Yser Canal near Boesinghe, 31 July 1917. (Photograph Q 5726 from the collections of the Imperial War Museums)

The failure to breakthrough in August did not, however, cause Haig to abandon his plans for the Flanders campaign. He moved Gough aside and appointed Sir Herbert Plumer, the commander of the British Second Army, to lead a renewed attack on the German positions. Plumer was a different kind of general to Gough: much more cautious and less aggressive, not a gung-ho 'thruster', but a careful, thoughtful and considered man. Plumer did not aim to break through as Gough had. On the contrary, he planned a series of limited 'bite and hold' attacks that would not aim for more than

his infantry could achieve. Based upon meticulous preparation and strictly-limited advances under a formidable array of artillery, Plumer would bite off the German positions one at a time.

Plumer's renewed attack took place on 20 September and marked the second major phase of the battle. The Battle of Menin Road (as it was subsequently known) was a much more effective demonstration of Britain's military power. With a greater concentration of force, Plumer's divisions were able to achieve their objectives and, crucially, hold onto them. When the Germans tried to counter-attack, they got nowhere. Instead of encountering strung-out and exhausted British units, Plumer's troops were now well dug-in and backed up by heavy artillery and machine-gun fire. This was the essence of 'bite and hold': employ overwhelming artillery fire to secure objectives and then support

the infantry in holding onto them, forcing the Germans to counter-attack into a hail of firepower. It turned the battle back in Haig's favour.

Plumer was able to repeat his feat two more times in quick succession: at Polygon Wood on 26 September and Broodseinde on 4 October. On each occasion, Plumer made an advance of around 1,200 yards and chewed up more German units. Although there was little chance that Plumer would achieve a breakthrough (his operations were not designed to), his hammer-blows put the German Army under enormous pressure. Indeed the German High Command was at a loss with how to respond. They tried bolstering the front line with more men, but this did nothing other than fill Germany's hospitals with yet more dying and wounded. After the attack on 4 October, there was flicker of panic in at German headquarters. They were struggling to keep their units up to strength, morale was plummeting, and the British artillery continued to pound them into submission. Indeed, there was little else the German Army could do other than hope the wet weather would return and deluge the battlefield once again.



German prisoners and British wounded cross the Yser Canal near Boesinghe, 31 July 1917. (Photograph Q 5726 from the collections of the Imperial War Museums)

By November 1917 the British had reached the Passchendaele Ridge, but encountered a return to the problems of July and August, namely worsening weather and not enough time to prepare their attacks properly. Nevertheless, the battles that General Plumer fought between 20 September and 4 October marked the high point of the offensive and pioneered a new type of fighting that proved highly effective. Indeed, had Plumer been in charge from the beginning, and had he been given more time to batter the defenders, then it is possible that the German Army would have been faced with a stark choice: continue to suffer or make a major retreat.

100 years on the story of Third Ypres remains mired in tales of mud, blood and futility. Yet Passchendaele illustrated how changes in tactics and technology were transforming the battlefield and how, in the right circumstances, the British Expeditionary Force could be highly effective. It remains to be seen whether

the UK Government's commemorations will do justice to the complexity of the battle and the story of a remarkable triumph against the odds – what I have called a 'lost victory' – or whether it will recycle the old stories of suffering and stupidity. Perhaps in a year that will see Britain begin to carve out a new global role for itself, it is about time we moved on from the endless repetition of the horrors of the First World War and rediscovered some pride in the remarkable achievements of previous generations.



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British Practices of Remembrance: Politics and Poppies

by Maggie Andrews

In November 2016, a row erupted between the English Football Association and FIFA, (Fédération Internationale de Football Association). The dispute focused on whether the English football team could wear black armbands embellished with an embroidered red poppy during their World Cup qualifying match against Scotland on 11 November, the anniversary of WWI Armistice. The red poppy has been the symbol of The Royal British Legion (TRBL) since the charity was formed in 1921 to care for members of the Armed Forces who suffered injuries in the First World War. Plastic and paper poppies were produced by disabled ex-servicemen, and sold in the run up to Armistice day to raise funds for the Legion to support servicemen and their families. 40 million poppies are now produced annually commonly worn in November to remember those who lost their lives armed conflict.

The meaning of the red poppy is, like all symbols, contested; shifting and subject to appropriation, and most recently has taken on an almost sacred status. Their use and alleged misuse evokes fierce emotions. Approximately 5 million people visited the art installation made up of 888,246 ceramic red poppies entitled Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red in the moat of the Tower of London between July and November 2014, which commemorated British and colonial servicemen killed in the First World War.

Yet, as recently as November 2000, neither English nor Scottish football teams wore poppies playing one another, nor did the English team wear poppies in their match against Yugoslavia on Armistice Day in 1987. But in 2016, the year of the Brexit vote and the rise of nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments, things were very different.

In the twenty-first century a multicultural and divided Britain, uncertain of its place in the world, increasingly regards narratives, images, memories and myths of the First and Second World War as intrinsic to its sense of national identity. In cultural memory, these conflicts are associated, albeit inaccurately, with an era when Britain wielded power and influence on the world stage, an era before the USA's economic and political hegemony. Thus, the black armbands with an embroidered poppy both English and Scottish Football teams wore on 11 November 2016 were a display of respect for those who died in the First World War and an assertion of national identity; to FIFA as a "political"

symbol they contravened the regulations. As the row became increasingly heated, the new right-wing Conservative British Prime Minister Theresa May described FIFA's position as "utterly outrageous" whilst former England defender Danny Mills questioned whether the money spent on arguments, lawyers and the fines FIFA imposed would have been better donated to TRBL. His "common sense" position neglects the passion now invested in remembrance. In contemporary Britain wearing a poppy, remembrance activities and watching national sporting teams compete have all become legitimate areas for the emotional outpouring of national fervour which political groups seek to harness and position themselves in relation to.



Royal British Legion poppy, worn in the UK and other Commonwealth countries from late October to Remembrance Sunday to remember those servicemen and women who died in war. (Photograph: Philip Stevens.)

Ironically, the poppy, now so invested with ideas of Britishness was first embraced as a sign of remembrance in the USA and Canada at the instigation of Moina Michael. The poppy's association with the First World War dead was inspired by the poem, *In Flanders Fields* written by a Canadian Medical Officer Col. John McCrae, in May 1915. The poem begins:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

By the time that TRBL adopted the red poppy as its emblem, the commemoration of the 1914-18 conflict on Armistice day, had taken

on what have become familiar its characteristics, including two minutes silence at 11 o'clock to mark the cessation of hostilities. This practice started in 1919, following a press release from Buckingham Palace stating :

Tuesday next, 11 November, is the first anniversary of the Armistice, which stayed the worldwide carnage of the four preceding years and the victory of Right and Freedom.

The following year the Cenotaph was unveiled in Whitehall. The stone monument was produced in response to public pressure after a similar temporary wooden and plaster edifice was created for the July 1919 peace celebrations. Since 1920, political dignitaries, members of the royal family and war veterans have participated in the two minutes silence and an Armistice Day ceremony at the cenotaph. Media coverage gave this national significance; newspaper front pages and film newsreels watched by millions provided a lexicon of images of remembrance. Furthermore by the early 1930s most homes had a radio, enabling

the two minutes silence to become a national event, shared via the airwaves; simultaneously participated in in homes across the country, where it became part of everyday life, a backdrop to domestic chores. By the 1930s war memorials had become part of the landscape of almost every town and village in Britain, but controversy over their use emerged alongside anxiety over the possibility of another military conflict. The Women's Co-operative Guild, a political left-leaning national housewives organization, produced white poppies to convey their commitment to peace, however, when they laid white poppy wreaths at war memorials on Armistice Day, it was not always well received. Yet the League of Nations Union also chose this day to campaign against the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

Even in the aftermath of the Second World War, the performance of military remembrance continued to be shaped by the iconography of the First World War, although the focus of activities shifted from Armistice Day to Remembrance Sunday, set at the Second Sunday in November, nearest to 11 November. It was intended to commemorate those who had served in both wars and the names of the Second World War dead were added onto local World War One memorials. In the years that followed both Remembrance Sunday and wearing the red poppy were extended to refer to the dead of all armed conflicts. However in national narratives if the Second World War is seen as a "good war", a noble fight against fascism, the battles of the last seventy years are more controversial, often associated with imperialism.

This was brought into sharp relief at the end of the 1960s when in response to civil unrest the British Army was deployed in Northern Ireland. Casualties ensued including the shooting of fourteen Catholic civilians by the army in Derry on 30th January 1972, known as Bloody Sunday. As political tensions escalated the following year, the silence at the Cenotaph Remembrance on Sunday ceremony was interrupted by two women, who had lost their husbands in the conflict, shouting: "What about the war widows?" They were protesting against their poverty and questioning their exclusion from ideas of the nation embedded in remembrance. Allegedly, police scrambled through the crowds, put hands over the women's mouths and led them away.

In 1987 a bomb interrupted the Remembrance Sunday parade at Enniskillen in Northern Ireland, killing 11 people. The perpetrators, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in targeting such an event critiqued both the actions of the armed forces and the fiction of national unity implicit in such events. Northern Ireland Catholic communities had by then totally rejected the wearing of red remembrance poppies, linking them to the Ulster Unionists and army atrocities such as Bloody Sunday. More recently, Premier League Footballer James McClean originally from Derry, has repeatedly refused to wear a poppy on his shirt worn by many English footballers in November. Subject to a barrage of criticism including death threats, he has defended his position, explaining:

If the poppy was simply about World War One and Two victims alone, I'd wear it without a problem....but... it stands for all the conflicts that Britain has been involved in. Because of the history

where I come from in Derry, I cannot wear something that represents that.

Maclean's rejection of the red poppy is not alone; presenter, Jon Snow, described the pressure to wear one on television, prior to Armistice Day, as "poppy fascism". Others have chosen to adopt the white poppy to articulate their opposition to war, the purple poppy, which remembers animal victims of war, or the black poppy, which acts as a symbol of Black soldiers' contribution to Britain campaigns in World War One and Two. The black poppy can be seen both as an indicative of how contested remembrance remains and as a response to the rhetoric of the far-right which peddles an inaccurate but pervasive version of the First and Second World Wars as part of a "glorious pre-mass-immigration past". The leader of the British National Party, Nick Griffin, wore a red poppy when election campaigning and broadcasting in 2009, despite requests from TRBL not to do so. The red poppy's association with Britishness, legitimated him within traditional ideas of the nation as did the image of Nigel Farage, when leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), wiping tears from his eyes as he viewed the ceramic poppies at the Tower of London. In the cultural politics which will provide a backdrop to Brexit negotiations in the next two years it is to be hoped that the associations of the red remembrance poppy are either wrestled back from the far right or lose their centrality to the country's sense of itself.



Maggie Andrews is a Professor of Cultural History at the University of Worcester whose current research and publications focus on the Home Front in World War One and Two and the place of these conflicts in contemporary British culture. She is a Co-Investigator on the AHRC Voices of War and Peace WWI Engagement Centre.

The Cultural Memory of 1945

by Steven Fielding

According to Simon Heffer, those who aspired to lead the Labour party after its 2015 election defeat were “not even fighting the last election, but rather the one in 1945”. Heffer – possibly Britain’s most reactionary columnist – cited the 1945 general election to establish Labour’s irrelevance. For, according to him, Labour’s victory occurred in what he regarded as a very different country, one that “still had a substantial working class [and] low living standards”.

The Right has always had a very particular take on 1945: it’s when Britain took the wrong turn, a mistake only corrected in 1979. Even the Right would however concede that the general election of 1945 is one of the key turning points of modern British history. Labour after all won a Commons majority for the first time and used it to create the welfare state and National Health Service, nationalise key industries and to actively pursue a policy of full employment, all while the country recovered from fighting the war. But how has Labour remembered the election? What has been the cultural memory of what was the party’s greatest triumph?

History and cultural memory

According to Emily Robinson, so far as political parties are concerned the past serves a radically different function to the one it used to perform. For Labour as with the Conservatives the past now just affirms the present: it does not have an independent existence, so that it can no longer hold the present to account. The past remains important but in a very restricted way. It can for example be useful for politicians to claim a link with the past – to assert that they are part of some kind of tradition – but this past, that tradition is merely the tool of those who call it into being. For, citing the past does not imply the present has any responsibility to it, for history has become, as Robinson puts it, “a political prop, not a political force”.

According to her, both parties now have the same relationship to the past one defined by their adherence to “progress” and “modernity”. Robinson sees this transformation as part of a general change in popular attitudes, which means that for most people the past has become part of a “permanent present”. Historians have started to explore this phenomenon and in particular what they term “cultural memory”, that is a “memory” of events of which most have no personal experience, one that according to Geoff Eley, has been transmitted through “confusions of mass-mediated meanings”.

Labour and cultural memory

Political parties have played their part in shaping the nation’s cultural memory. Indeed, according to Henry Drucker, writing in 1979, Labour once had a “strong sense of its

own past”, one that played a crucial role in reinforcing its sense of purpose. This consciousness of the past was certainly evident when Labour won office in July 1945. It is striking that when party figures made sense of their victory they looked to the past.

To them, 1945 was the climax of Labour’s ineluctable rise, the end of the beginning of what Francis Williams called its “Magnificent Journey”. This was seen as an evolutionary process, with Labour conceived as part of developing national tradition that began with Magna Carta and the Peasant’s Revolt. Thanks to this way of thinking, it was believed 1945 was part of an irreversible process. So, even defeat in 1951 did not unduly dismay many party members: it merely showed that Labour needed to redouble its efforts and remain true to its beliefs and the tradition which had found its ultimate manifestation in 1945.

Drucker claims Hugh Gaitskell and other revisionists challenged this perspective. For they asserted that the past was not a guide to the future, and that the party needed to rethink some of the key policies with which 1945 was associated – notably nationalization. According to them Labour had to become a “future-orientated organization”. After Gaitskell’s death, Harold Wilson stressed even more than did his predecessor Labour’s embrace of modernity. To make it relevant to the “New Britain”, Wilson famously tied the party’s fortunes to “the white heat of technological change”.

According to Drucker the denigration of the past was ill judged. Labour members needed a sense of history, one largely comprised of folk memories of trade union struggle and workplace suffering, as these bound the party’s working-class supporters to the organization. Such socially rooted memories, obligated those in the present to honour those figures from the past who had sacrificed themselves to the future.

But the party of which Drucker wrote in 1979 was in flux, its membership in decline and becoming more middle-class. Trade union influence would soon suffer a severe reverse: by the start of the 1990s the unions were a cowed and marginal force. By then Labour had responded to four successive electoral defeats with Neil Kinnock’s “modernization”, a process that ended with New Labour. And if Gaitskell had started the process of transforming Labour’s attitude to the past then as in so many other ways Tony Blair completed it. New Labour was – as the name implied –enthusiastically “modern”.

“Old Labour” was the name New Labour gave the party’s past. So Blair’s interpretation of 1945 was an exercise in picking and choosing. For while he claimed to “honour the generation of 1945” Blair did not feel bound by them. He even criticized the likes of Attlee for not resolving “fundamental issues of ideology and organization”, by which Blair meant leaving clause four in place and not tackling the unions’ role in the



Clement Attlee, Prime Minister from 1945 to 51 and mythic architect of the Labour Party’s key accomplishments of the post-war era.

party. Blair consequently only highlighted the “enduring values of 1945”, that is those that in his view remained relevant to New Labour’s position. This meant emphasising that in winning in 1945 Labour’s agenda “cut decisively with not against the grain of political thinking” and embodied “national purpose and personal advancement”, “economic modernization” and individual “freedom”. Blair was also keen to stress that Attlee’s winning agenda owed much to ideas generated from outside the party, notably the “radical Liberal tradition”. In this way he argued New Labour was doing the work of the generation of 1945, by remaining true to their “values” even as Blair disavowed the kind of state collectivism with which 1945 is conventionally associated.

The Spirit of ‘45

Ken Loach’s 2013 documentary *The Spirit of ‘45* outlined a less nuanced perspective. This gathering of ‘memories and reflections’ was a much-heralded attempt to convince those living in Austerity Britain that there was a viable alternative. According to the film this was manifested in those popular socialist sentiments revealed by the Second World War and which were responsible for Labour’s victory. As such, the film is probably the most overtly politicized example of the ‘cultural memory’ of 1945.

According to Loach, Labour applied socialist collectivism through its nationalisation programme, welfare measures and creation of the NHS. Excerpts from *Let Us Face the Future* feature large, while a clip in which Attlee refers to Labour as a “socialist” party is repeated so as to suggest that the people’s mood was matched by Labour’s own ambition. Collectivism having withered with Margaret Thatcher’s election in 1979 Loach claimed: “It’s time to put back on the agenda the importance of public ownership



and public good, the value of working together collaboratively, not in competition”. For, the film argues, as the people had once embraced socialism, they could do so again, signified visually at the end when hitherto black and white clips from the 1940s appear in colour, suggesting 1945 and 2013 were closer than some might imagine. According to one of Loach’s interviewees, sounding very much like a Labour figure from the 1940s, 1945 was but one expression of the people’s ongoing desire to hold things in common, something first expressed in the Peasants Revolt.

Loach’s political intentions in making the film became obvious in 2014 when he helped form Left Unity, which stood candidates in the 2015 general election, against Labour. Left Unity’s programme followed the one outlined in his documentary: a complete rejection of the market. This was of course not the approach for which Labour stood in 2015 or 1945, but then Loach was no social democrat. Since then however Loach has thrown his support behind Jeremy Corbyn’s hard left leadership of the Labour Party, and has in turn been embraced by Corbyn’s support group Momentum.

Conclusion

As Emily Robinson might have predicted, 1945 has become the plaything of Labour’s present: a useful device to inspire activists, and if articulated in the right way, ordinary voters.

But if Labour is now afraid to say much beyond banalities about the election, 1945 hasn’t quite disappeared. Those to Labour’s left and its right still have an active cultural memory of the period. Ironically both see 1945 a socialist moment, the former to suggest the continued relevance of collectivism, the latter to make the very opposite point.

Steven Fielding is Professor of Political History at the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham. He has published extensively across a wide range of topics related to British politics and has a long-standing interest in the history and contemporary politics of the Labour Party.

Remembering Peterloo

by John Gardner

Amritsar (1919). Kent State (1970). Sharpeville (1960). Soweto (1976). Tiananmen Square (1989). The list of massacres of peaceful protesters by their own governing forces is lengthy and would obliterate the word limit of this issue if all could possibly be named. But when citizens are again killed by authorities, Peterloo is often invoked and remembered. That massacre, in Manchester on 16 August 1819, saw fifteen people mortally wounded on the day and over 650 injured. What started out as a peaceful gathering with a carnival atmosphere, ended up becoming, as Robert Poole states, “the bloodiest political event of the nineteenth century on English soil.”

Many more have been killed in other massacres, yet Peterloo remains significant in the public consciousness when others are forgotten. Approaching the bicentenary of the event there will be papers, conferences and commemorations around the world. This article considers why this event, which is not taught regularly at schools or universities, and has no monument, has been remembered, continuing to serve as a touchstone for subsequent killings of citizens who protest.

The facts—the names and dates—are generally agreed on. Unarmed people from the Lancashire region, consisting of men, women and children marched to St. Peter’s Field in Manchester carrying banners protesting that one of the biggest cities in Britain had no elected representative in Parliament. Among slogans on the banners were “Annual Parliaments”, “The Poor the Source of all Government”, “Labour is the Source of All Wealth” and “No Taxation Without Equal Representation”. A number of women reformers dressed in white surrounded the hustings that were occupied by the organisers, headed by Henry “Orator” Hunt, who was to address the crowd. Surrounding them were 1,500 troops, 1,000 of whom were regular soldiers.

The authorities, headed by clerical magistrates, the Reverend Charles Ethelston and the Reverend William Robert Hay, the self-termed “Committee of Public Safety”, gathered at a Mr. Buxton’s house, which overlooked St Peter’s Field. They then waited until 1.35 pm. when the crowd had grown to around 60-80,000 before Ethelston reputedly read the Riot Act from a window, leaning out so far that Hay allegedly held his coat. Many said that it was never read. The Manchester and Salford Yeomanry, which consisted of well-off young men who had bought their own uniforms, then attempted to get to the hustings to arrest the organisers, but soon got into trouble as they tried to hack their way through the compacting crowd. The real soldiers, the 15th Hussars, some of whom were wearing their Waterloo medals, then followed.

Only twenty-five minutes after the Riot Act was reported to have been read, the field had been cleared, except for the casualties. In the surrounding streets those escaping were pursued and attacked in the hours that followed. The Prince Regent, later George IV, congratulated the yeomanry on their actions that day, and the poet laureate Robert Southey’s first response was to organise a petition supporting those he believed had put down a ‘rascally rabble’. The name ‘Peter-loo’ was coined, firstly in *The Manchester Observer*, apparently because the Hussars were wearing their Waterloo medals. Another explanation is that a special constable entered the house of an Ann Jones, who was helping the wounded, and shouted “This is Waterloo for you – this is Waterloo!”



George Cruikshank, ‘The Clerical Magistrate’, *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819)

The backdrop of this bloody event included economic decline and political repression. The period from 1815 to 1821, saw reformers and radicals fighting through strikes and protests to gain access to representation in unreformed Britain, where under 5% of the male population had the right to vote. After the battle of Waterloo, a post-war slump set in that was worsened with poor harvests—the explosion of Mount Tambora in Indonesia caused the famous “year without a summer”. With around 200 000 combatants returning from the war to unemployment, Britain was in the depths of a depression. The period from 1819 to 1820 marks the high point of repression in Britain during the nineteenth century. In the months after Peterloo, “Six Acts” were passed that affected freedoms and trebled the price of newspapers. “Rebellions” followed, at least one of which was fomented by a government spy system that aimed to draw out radical reformers. These apparent risings, involving a very small number of people,

led to eight men being publically hanged and beheaded for High Treason in front of crowds of up to 100 000 people at Glasgow, London and Stirling, between May and September 1820. It was another ninety-six years, until the Easter Rising in 1916, before anyone was executed for High Treason again.

In the immediate aftermath of Peterloo there was a battle to control and set the narrative of the event in the minds of the public. All events are ephemeral and different versions of how they should be remembered battle for domination in the public sphere. Narratives of Peterloo took many forms including: a public trial of the organisers, an inquest into a death, newspaper articles, published accounts and, perhaps most powerfully, poetry and illustrations that could transmit messages to even the illiterate. At the time of writing there have been found, in various archives, over three hundred eye-witness accounts by 266 people who witnessed the march to St. Peter’s Field and the massacre. The *London Times* had a reporter, John Tyas, on

the platform with the organisers, and his accounts sided with the people who were massacred. Probably the most widely read version of events is Samuel Bamford's *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1838). Bamford had been on the hustings with Hunt and has been hugely influential in shaping perceptions of the massacre:

The cavalry were in confusion: they evidently could not, with all the weight of man and horse, penetrate that compact mass of human beings; and their sabres were plied to hew a way through naked held-up hands, and defenceless heads; and then chopped limbs, and wound-gaping skulls were seen, and groans and cries were mingled with the din of that horrid confusion. "Ah! Ah!" "for shame! for shame!" was shouted.

The trial of the organisers led to Bamford, Hunt and three others being imprisoned. An inquest for John Lees, a Waterloo veteran who had been stabbed and suffered a lingering death, exposed some of the barbarity of the massacre. Lees is reported as saying that "at Waterloo there was man to man, but there it was down-right murder".

Many accounts in prose and poetry, such as Percy Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy", depict women being murdered at Peterloo. Sherwin's *Weekly Register* asserted: "Women appear to have been the particular objects of the fury of the Cavalry Assassins. One woman [...] was sabred over the head [...] some were sabred in the breast; so inhuman, indiscriminate, and fiend-like, was the conduct of the Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry." Figures compiled by M. L. Bush in *The Casualties of Peterloo* seem to bear this out. A two-year-old child there with his mother was the first victim on the day. Although comprising only an eighth of the number at Peterloo, more than a quarter of all casualties were women. Four of the fifteen killed on the day were women and indeed illustrations, poems and articles all emphasise women being particularly targeted. Most accounts by sympathisers of the protesters seem to exonerate the regular soldiers and damn the yeomanry.

The established church is also remembered badly by this event. The clerical magistrates Hay and Ethelstone became the subject of articles, squibs, poetry and devastating cartoons such as George Cruikshank's "The Clerical Magistrate". This illustration from *The Political House that Jack Built* shows the incompatible position of churchmen acting as judges. On the left Ethelston holds a cross and preaches above the Christogram "IHS". Facing the right he holds a gibbet, shackles and a flail as he "Commits starving vagrants" above a crown with the initials GPR--George Prince Regent.

The continued remembrance of Peterloo, without a monument, an educational curriculum, or living memory, serves as a warning that, even in periods of the severest repression, state-sanctioned violence is not forgotten. Peterloo is a Mancunian wound that, through multi-media exposure, became visible all over the world, as the art it inspired found new audiences. The people and institutions responsible for the massacre are remembered with ignominy. Out of all of the memorials though I think that the poetry and cartoons have survived best. The compression of anger in Shelley's poem "England in 1819" where he sides with a "people starved and stabbed on the untilled field" has survived. George Cruikshank's still rousing illustrations of Peterloo such as



STEEL LOZENGES

will stop their pain,
And set the Constitution
right again.

George Cruikshank. 'Steel Lozenges'. The Man in the Moon. London: William Hone, 1819.

"Manchester Heroes", "Peterloo Memorial" and "Steel Lozenges", devastatingly mock and mangle the guilty with a sardonic, lacerating humour that can produce a laugh and sickness at the same time. Writing in *Past and Present* Thomas Carlyle stated that Peterloo had left a "treasury of rage" behind "ever since". The historian G. M. Trevelyan's last words were reportedly, "Peterloo 1819".



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The Heritage Industry Evolves

by Brian Goodey

Gathering thoughts on the day the May-inspired General Election is called, there seems little room for “heritage” in any tangible form, although the cheap hucksterism of “Brexit Means Brexit” relies on a broad presumed concern for national identity and its icons. Heritage may well form the reassuring backdrop to debates as to the rights (and costs) of “our” welfare structures, and indeed the endowed British qualities of contesting leaders.

In 1985 Patrick Wright published *On Living in an Old Country*, and two years later Robert Hewison authored *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*. Both made swinging criticism of the impression that, for middle-class Britain, at least, “the past was a better place”, a view that excluded concern for contemporary issues and especially cultural creativity. Earlier, in 1981, architectural critic, Stephen Games had concluded that “as the belief in heritage grips us more and more firmly ... we consign ourselves to a great cultural holding operation ... a necropolis for tourists and romantic poets”.

Over thirty years, a generation, how has Britain responded? There is certainly more designated “heritage”, more collections and events drawing crowds, more collecting of past artefacts, more museums and experiences, more re-creative events, more plaques on buildings, more debates over demolition, more rock group revivals, and more fashion re-cycling. With this development came a proliferation of popular terminology – vintage, veteran, classic, antique, collectors, retro etc. All share the implication of saving from the past, sharing and/or reusing in the present with the expectation that future generations will learn and enjoy.

Is this not just an element in the future-directed design cycle? Trouble is that the earlier critics did not see “heritage” as an important element in design and innovation evolution. The current London Science Museum display on robots is not an aspic covered glass box exhibit, but an orchestrated consolidation of past ideas available to the many viewers to consider and dream on. Bowie’s costumes at the V & A performed a similar function. If the visitor builds on the past for their future it is worthwhile.

The understanding of British “heritage” has moved mightily in the past century. When I tagged on in the early 1950s, it was

largely the unattractive opportunity to visit, with suitable reverence, cathedrals, and Ministry of Works sites that the state had decided might encourage belief that shattered stonework would stimulate a concern for Royal history.

The 1951 Festival of Britain blew that apart by suggesting that traditional craft and industry could sit alongside post-war innovation – modern art references to English traditions with late Industrial machines and structures. At that time the little used concept of “heritage” largely applied to stately homes, religious buildings and civic structures intended to impress – access controlled and relatively uninformed. A major exception were the country houses and landscapes managed by the National Trust (founded 1895, statutory power 1907) whose oak leaf symbol marked many coastal, heath and moorland sites, and whose blue-rinsed lay volunteers guarded the dowdy interiors of mansions that original owners had foresworn.

Today the National Trust remains a major charitable player, maintaining conservation aims but broadening attitude and policy to encourage active family use of grounds, events and commercial activity (“Disneyfication” as some critics would have it). Not all heritage-related organisations have fared so well. The Civic Trust, founded in 1959 as a force for urban design quality and town heritage had a trusted seat at policy tables with award schemes and Heritage Open Days, but by 2009 was wound up. Its major product – town centre quality – not sufficiently high on the agenda of car-borne shoppers or government.

Changes in heritage identification, conservation, management and access have always been tied to the need for funding to save and conserve elements

that appeal – through professional judgement, or more personal choice – to individuals or enthusiasts.

A substantial change in the way in which stately homes, and their occupants, were viewed by a broader public came about when the Marquis of Bath opened his home at Longleat on a commercial basis in 1949 and a Safari Park in 1966, similarly the Duke of Bedford at Woburn Abbey in 1970. It was all very well for flamboyant owners to go public, but shared heritage, part of a nationalised industry, was something different. In 1961, the demolition of the 1837 Doric Arch in front of Euston Station in



The Festival of Britain emblem – the Festival Star – designed by Abram Games, from the cover of the South Bank Exhibition Guide, 1951.

London was, perhaps, the single event that most clearly alerted a comfortable, informed elite, that change meant change. The arch, a substantial part of which has latterly been fished out of a London waterway, may well be reconstructed to herald the arrival of the HS2 high-speed London to Birmingham rail link, which will itself destroy substantial natural, landscape, and archaeological heritage in its passage.

A passing generation still sees Euston as the “Waterloo” of heritage battles in Britain, though the subject (and indeed its programmed reconstruction) seem of little public interest. At the time it did extend the heritage debate with provocative headlines – “Monumental Folly” (Peter Hall) and “The Rape of Britain” (Amery & Cruickshank). A broader public interest was strongly encouraged by the Council of Europe’s Architectural Heritage Year (EAHY) in 1975, not the only European event to benefit Britain’s heritage! EAHY encouraged interpretation (demystification from fine art language), education and access to built heritage. In the same year SAVE, an effective pressure group for threatened buildings was established. EAHY substantially reshaped British heritage alerting local communities to their place-making assets.

By 1983 English Heritage was established to manage the public stock of historic buildings, latterly developing their income potential, and also to offer conservation advice and judgement on building change. After 2015 the title was retained by the «industrial» arm, developing the commercial potential of monuments, whilst Historic England focused on designation and protection. Like the National Trust, these are the heritage industry giants. Even more influential in both the scope and support for heritage has been the Heritage Lottery Fund, established as a distributor of national lottery investment in 1993. This has really been the major driving force of heritage policy since its establishment with increasingly focused funding of museums, parks, town centres and many other initiatives. Increasingly the HLF has demanded evidence that heritage projects are grounded in community interests and long term support before financial help is offered.

When the York Archaeological Trust took advantage of recent developer excavations to design the Yorvik Viking Centre in 1984 they were estimating that a novel, ride-based, underground experience would draw successfully from a York tourist market. They were right, and were the first to offer heritage as an «experience» based on an established market and indigenous heritage.

By 2000 the British heritage industry had lost its way. «Interpretation» and “experiences” had glossed over authenticity. Prime Minister Blair re-christened the “Department of National Heritage” as “The Department of Culture, Media and Sport” and embarked on a series of concepts without substance. The Millennium Experience in the Dome – now the O2 Arena – was the clearest example of this; a structure with loss-making,

unappealing, sponsored content.

Heritage, in its broadest sense, was saved and nourished by television, and latterly by personal electronic media highlighting what is to see, enjoy and where. The industry has benefitted from, but will seldom acknowledge, carefully crafted series that link the viewer with a personal past, be it objects, relatives or local history. This is where heritage hits home.

The “Antiques Roadshow” begun in 1979, a discussion of prized personal objects offering expert analysis and value estimates. “Bargain Hunt”, a game show of find and sell started in 2000. Each series encourages looking, finding, evaluating and understanding a personal heritage. Add to this “Time Team” a weekly short-term archaeological dig that suggested that everywhere there might be a worthwhile past underground. It ran from 1994 to 2014 but convinced a generation that archaeology was worthwhile, that sites needed excavation, that the distant past was interesting. Finally add “Who Do You Think You Are?”, 2004 and ongoing, an hour-long genealogical study of a “celebrity” where tears mesh with connections low and high, and encourage use of the web sites that now uncover for all so many previously obscure documents.

British heritage may well still be located “out there” but is less likely to be unapproachable, more likely to be available at the weekend, with events, with hands on, with minor TV stars, with a chance for you and yours to grab a bit for your own past and future. The semi-sacred, professionally designated heritage remains, and is essential for conservation, authenticity, ICOMOS determinations and the rest, but there is also now the personal link that is so essential in funding the future of heritage.

Britain’s heritage is, indeed, an industry and one which can bring substantial returns, but how far will market forces steer conservation judgements in the future? Will the decaying skills of aged volunteers be replaced by apprentice training, will «experiences» rule over displays based on authenticity, and who will decide which personal or community heritage deserves raising to regional or national status? Motorbikes, rock star costumes, minor post-War vehicles, Bakelite, football grounds, early mobile phones and retro shop fronts all vie for attention. How far will we permit the market to be the measure of survival?

Preferences and policies for discarding or conserving the past say much for our individual and shared vision of the future. Watch carefully if, and when, Britain moves beyond the Brexit tautology.



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Remembering the War on Screen: British Film and Television Drama and the Second World War

by Siân Nicholas

There has always been an ambivalence about the British memory of the Second World War. “Carrying on”, “muddling through”, “the Dunkirk/Blitz spirit”, have become national cultural shorthand for the British experience of “the People’s War”, embodying social unity, a can-do spirit, and a moment of national togetherness unsurpassed before or since. This vision of Britain has been sufficiently versatile to be embraced by both the political left (who saw the 1945 general election as the climax of socialist aspiration) and the right (who cast Britain as leading the rest of the world to victory through strong leadership and national resolve).

There has likewise been an ambivalence about British cultural representations of the Second World War. The films made during the war are popularly dismissed as crude patriotic propaganda, so by definition unworthy of close attention, though the best of them are in fact tightly crafted, grounded in real experience, and suffused with authentic loss. Subsequent screen renditions, whether for film or television, have had to tread a careful path: too dour an approach offends the patriotic, too glamorised a depiction prompts accusations of disrespect.

The most celebrated wartime films were of course both socially inclusive and implicitly progressive in tone, a “soft” politicisation of the “People’s war” that had clear propaganda value as well as appealing directly to the lives and concerns of contemporary audiences. However, the growing mythology of a victorious “People’s War” saw the war itself recede into a collection of comforting stereotypes that arguably sustained a nation in imperial decline. By the late 1980s, with Margaret Thatcher riding high on the “Falklands Factor” and invoking Britain’s wartime defiance in her arguments against the EU, it appeared to many that while the progressive left had initially thought they had “won” the war, the nationalistic right had snatched it from them. It was in this context that in 1991 historian Angus Calder caused consternation among right-wing commentators by arguing that what he provocatively termed the “myth of the Blitz” was derived less from the historical reality of home front life than from the propaganda efforts aimed at home and overseas audiences (specifically the USA) during the war. His plea for a more realistic and politically aware understanding of the war and what it meant to the British people then and since seemed vindicated when in 1994 John Major’s Conservative government astonishingly announced that the official 50th anniversary commemorations of D-Day would centre around street parties, Glenn Miller concerts and “spam fritter competitions” in Hyde Park - plans then hastily revised to focus on veterans’ groups and the landings instead.

It is noteworthy, then, how popular cultural treatments of the

Second World War have sought more thoughtful engagements with both the history and the popular memory of the war. In fact – if one sets aside the enduringly popular *Dad’s Army* (BBC, 1968-77) – which effectively now is the British popular memory of the Home Guard – screen engagements with the war have become typically more critical and complex over time. As early as 1970 ITV’s *A Family At War* (1970-72) was portraying the tensions and burdens of everyday wartime life. During the 1970s and 1980s a sequence of BBC Plays for Today interrogated anti-Semitism, patriotism, class and gender (*The Evacuees*; *Licking Hitler*; *The Imitation Game*; *Rainy Day Women*), while ITV series *Danger – UXB* (ITV, 1979), *We’ll Meet Again* (ITV, 1982) and *Piece of Cake* (ITV 1986) placed a variety of personal and emotional dramas within specific wartime settings (respectively a London bomb disposal unit, a rural village “invaded” by GIs and an RAF base).

The 1990s and 2000s saw some notably downbeat film depictions of wartime in *The End of the Affair* (1999), *Enigma* (2001) and *Atonement* (2007), while on television *Housewife, 49* (ITV, 2006) dramatised raw familial tensions. However, it was the phenomenally successful detective series *Foyle’s War* (ITV, 2002-2015) that perhaps offered the most surprising critical take on the wartime home front, exposing xenophobia, collaboration, institutional prejudice, official incompetence, petty corruption and sexual violence among other wartime failings, while presenting the war itself as often simply the context rather than the focus of the plot. Yet, expertly packaged as “heritage” drama, it attracted a large and loyal mainstream audience, and glowing accolades from newspapers which might have been expected to take exception to its distinctly revisionist stance, even in its final two series, set during the early years of post-war austerity, which suggest a nation struggling to put into practice the promises of the war against establishment resistance.

The two most recent (at the time of writing) examples of British popular culture engaging with the Second World War offer their own – and in their separate ways, also telling – takes on the wartime home front experience. First, *The Halcyon* (ITV, Jan-Feb 2017): a drama series set in a Mayfair hotel between May and December 1940. The setting would appear ideal for interrogating a range of elements of wartime life; however, the narrative appears unsure of its purpose. Plot-driven improbabilities abound: a hotel manager with a secret past and an enviable list of influential contacts; his barely adult daughter promoted from receptionist to assistant manager with unlikely ease; the resident American radio journalist styled as a cross between Edward R. Murrow and Rick Blaine from *Casablanca*; the sudden revelation that a leading character is in fact an enemy spy, and his equally

sudden - and drastic - demise). There are also some implausibly modern takes on class, race and sexuality (not to mention 1940s jazz culture). Underneath it all, the “myth” of 1940 does prevail: the Blitz is realistically frightening, but everyone does “carry on”, and tragedy when it strikes (albeit heavily flagged) provides a genuinely moving moment. But it is a curiously depoliticised narrative: the only upstairs-downstairs tension is personality-driven; the hotel attracts none of the opprobrium that its London counterparts were receiving at just this time for enabling their clienteles to dine and dance in full pre-war style during air raids in their suitably reinforced private basement shelters; nor indeed does it suffer, as famously did the Savoy Hotel during the air raids of 15 September 1940, an “invasion” of angry working class Londoners demanding shelter also.



Foyle's War: “the phenomenally successful detective series that perhaps offered the most surprising critical take on the wartime home front [...] while presenting the war itself as often simply the context rather than the focus of the plot.

Second, *Their Finest*, released in British cinemas in April 2017 and based on Lissa Evans’ 2010 novel, *Their Finest Hour and a Half*, set among a wartime film production team. On one level it offers another broadly conventional portrayal of wartime Londoners “taking it”. However, it is considerably more invested in historical plausibility than *The Halcyon* – notably an unflinching presentation of male attitudes to women’s employment roles during the war - and is also quietly sensitive to class, showing plausible groupings of people drawn together by the war, their different class backgrounds obvious and visible but presented as an accepted part of a mixed social environment; yet with hints that historical layers of deference are being gradually peeled away. Intriguingly, the film demonstrates a keen understanding not just of wartime life but of the wartime propaganda films that ostensibly drive the plot, both in its depiction of one such film’s creation, and in its own self-conscious following of these films’ typical narrative trajectory: new experiences and freedoms, peril from enemy attack, sudden and unexpected tragedy, wrenching internalised grief, and, finally, renewed resolve, all underpinned by a soft political engagement with issues of privilege, opportunity and sacrifice. It also respects the wartime cinema audience it portrays as having a healthy scepticism of clumsy film propaganda (in the film’s opening scene) and a sincere but self-aware emotional engagement in the final film (during its closing sequence).

What of the future? Certainly, an increasing interest in personal, local and sectional experiences has expanded public memory of the conflict: witness, for instance, the BBC’s highly successful People’s War website, launched in 2003; the unveiling of an official memorial to “The Women of World War II” at Whitehall in 2005; or the crowdfunded project to mark the 70th anniversary of the Bethnal Green tube disaster in 1943. The ways in which the war features in popular culture also appears increasingly diverse in approach and purpose. The BBC has, for instance, made a recent (and not altogether successful) foray into alt-history, with its dramatisation of Len Deighton’s 1978 novel *SS-GB* criticised for its dour and oddly flat representation of London under Nazi rule - though it perhaps suffered from comparisons with Amazon Prime’s high-concept American-set variant, *The Man in the High Castle*. And at the time of writing, two new films are due for imminent cinema release. *Dunkirk* promises an immersive experience of the evacuations from the perspectives of land, sea and (unusually) the air, deploying IMAX technology, with minimal backstories, pared-down dialogue, and featuring mostly relative unknowns as the soldiers. *Churchill* aims to challenge precedent by portraying the wartime leader not as a cigar-chomping bulldog figure but as a depressed and exhausted old man whose obsession with the past (specifically, his fear of presiding over another Gallipoli) threatens to jeopardise the D-Day landings, but who must ultimately cede to his American and European allies. The war – and its political meanings - continues to be recast.



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