

# 1940-2010: The Individual and Family Legacy of WW2 Internment as it Relates to the Isle of Man A Guide to Aid Personal Research

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**M**y previous article, 'Second World War internee records for the Isle of Man',<sup>1</sup> was published in the February and March 2008 issues of the *AJR Journal*. This led to around 130 responses from former internees and their family members, who contacted me with information about their experiences. The resulting exchange of information has led to a significant increase in the Manx Museum's resources on this topic.

It is undoubtedly true that research into internment has greatly increased over the last couple of decades. It is almost a parallel to the interest shown in the last survivors of the First World War, who, as they passed away, received considerable media coverage. The youngest former internee will be 65 this year and the youngest known 'adult' will be 84.<sup>2</sup> This growth in interest has led to publications which include personal accounts and the availability of online material and catalogues.<sup>3</sup> Primary material continues to come to light in family papers and to be deposited with archives and museums, where it can be made available to researchers.

On 27 May 2010 it was 70 years since the first internees arrived at Ramsey on the Belgian cross-Channel steamer *Princess Josephine Charlotte*. This group, 823 men, landed on Ramsey Pier and marched to the camp on Mooragh Promenade.<sup>4</sup>

This seems therefore to be an appropriate opportunity to provide some general guidance for those trying to reconstruct family experiences using examples of recently deposited items. Whilst records for the women and children have survived in significant numbers, those for the men have not.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the process of locating names and personal details of internees relies on linking together a web of material from which individual pieces in isolation appear to provide little useful information. I have found over the years that there are either those who wished to wipe out all memories of the experience, and so deliberately destroyed any evidence, or those who diligently collected and retained any scraps from their arrival in Britain and life before, during and after internment. Former internees often have vivid memories which they have passed on to children and grandchildren who may not always realise how much further information can sometimes be gleaned from seemingly insignificant items.

In recent years, I have seen or been sent copies of a wide variety of documentation in addition to the records Manx National Heritage holds. These include both official and personal items and I have used some examples from these in the following text. The Library has two large summary guides to our holdings of internment material which can be emailed on request as our catalogue is not yet available online.

## General comments

### Caution – research may rattle some family skeletons!

There are examples of painful personal histories which relatives may not wish to be revealed and sensitivity is required in such cases. The stress and separation of internment could, and did, lead to divorce or affairs. That there were a number of women interned who had previously supported themselves by being 'of negotiable affection' is well known, as is the fact that a number of illegitimate children were born in the camps. Sometimes these women went on after the war to marry and have other children and I have seen cases where half-siblings did not know of each other's existence. Separation could lead to the breakdown of relationships and second wives or husbands sometimes deliberately concealed previous relationships from their families and some did their best to conceal any trace of internment experiences. This explains to some extent why many archives have long closure periods for personal information to help avoid potential distress.

### Names and place names

Often enquirers forget that their grandfather changed his name or that their grandmother was unmarried at the time and ask us to check the wrong name! Some changes are quite subtle – e.g. Friedrich Goldschmidt to Fred Goldsmith – while others changed only a forename – e.g. Hans to Henry – or dropped a disliked first name although they still appear under the original name. Those who enlisted in the Pioneer Corps<sup>6</sup> and later transferred to active service units usually changed their name to an English one to protect both themselves and relatives should they be captured. Many of these were retained after the war and appear to bear no relation to the original names.

Place names are often difficult to read and, due to the post-war shift in

international boundaries, many places no longer exist in modern atlases. However, lists of these do exist, for example for the former areas of Germany now in Poland or Russia.

Transcription errors are frequent: many people with poor English handed documents over to registration clerks who copied the unfamiliar handwritten names on to registration cards and other documents. Variations or mistakes in the spelling of both forenames and surnames are common. A large number of our 'Alien' registration cards and lists also have the middle names Sarah and Israel, added to the documents of Jews by the Nazis; this can cause upset with such entries regarded as offensive. Many entries have only initials or lack forenames, which means we cannot be sure multiple entries are not all for one person. This is where gathering together snippets from a variety of sources can sometimes help.

## Some potential sources of information

*Please note: The following includes examples illustrating what is available and is by necessity highly selective. Please do not be offended if your family item is not mentioned.*

### Correspondence

Many families have such information, ranging from the standard official postcard on which certain phrases were deleted, to an envelope, a letter or even a series of letters, often written in English to avoid delays while awaiting the censor's approval.

A sample postcard is printed as follows:

**Nothing is to be written on this side except the date, signature and address of the sender. Erase words not required, IF ANYTHING ELSE IS ADDED THE POSTCARD WILL BE DESTROYED.**

*I am (not) well: I have been admitted into Hospital {sick For operation} and am going on well.*

*I am being transferred to another camp. I have [illegible] card dated*

*Signature  
Camp Address*

This example has an oval stamp stating 'Hutchinson Internment Camp Douglas IOM 13 Jul 1940'.<sup>7</sup>

A simple posted envelope will often have a legible censor stamp marked with a camp code letter<sup>8</sup> and a date and may

indicate a house number. This will confirm where and when an internee was there. Increasingly, examples of these appear on eBay or similar sites marketed to collectors of postmarks. It is often possible to recognise the internee's name written on the reverse, although in many cases a scrawled name can be virtually illegible.

A fascinating example of this is found in the papers of William Steiner. He and his brother Francis, being of Jewish descent, were forced to leave Vienna and both ended up interned. William, as a student, was released after 6 months, while Francis was held for 15 months in 3 camps. Several other relations were also interned, including 2 cousins. Between them they were in 5 camps.

In 2008 Francis revisited the Island he had left in 1941 and stayed in a hotel a few yards from the site of the Central Camp. It was my pleasure to drive him around camp sites in Douglas and Onchan and stand with him where he had been nearly 70 years before. When his late brother's children realised he was visiting they told him to his surprise that the family still had a number of personal papers, including a large collection of letters Francis had written to him from the camps, and he kindly agreed to deposit these with us. These letters provide fascinating insight into camp life, with mentions of inter-camp activities such as football matches, and many refer to fellow internees. Some of these are written on the special-issue paper and envelopes which restricted the number of lines per message.<sup>9</sup> One of my colleagues also conducted an oral history interview with him while he was here. Furthermore, he deposited examples of the camp bank notes and coins used in Onchan which he had kept in near-perfect condition all these years.<sup>10</sup>



Special bank notes were printed and coins minted. This is one of several values issued for Onchan Camp (2/6 = 12.5p).

**Artwork, camp newspapers and arts and crafts**

Many individuals, including artists, sculptors and engravers, found themselves interned, particularly in the Hutchinson Camp. They kept themselves busy using any available material to produce artwork and would have accepted commissions. Such items regularly come to light and are worth checking for signatures or initials to identify the person depicted (if unknown) or the artist.

An example is a portrait of Simon Feibusch, 1891-1965, an internee in the Mooragh Camp, painted by Erich Wolfsfeld<sup>11</sup> and retained by his family, who also have other items

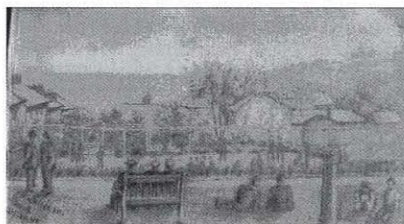


from the camp, including an illustration of a room decorated for the Jewish festival of Succot.<sup>12</sup>

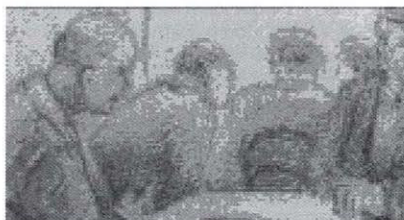
Another example is this illustrated menu for meals served in Mooragh Internment Camp on 2-5 October 1940, a period which includes Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year).<sup>13</sup> You can see the named individuals, which may be the only positive indication where they were held.



Many internees made personal sketch books. One example is by Professor Oscar Fehr, an ophthalmic surgeon who was elected chief eye specialist for all IOM camps while interned in Hutchinson Camp in 1940 despite being 69 years old. It contains a number of sketches made in Hutchinson and a view across the square which can still be identified today.<sup>14</sup>



View from the top side of the square looking towards Douglas Bay (the square is on a slope and there is a three-tiered grass lawn garden in the centre)



Scene presumably inside one of the houses in the camp

A number of camp magazines were produced. These include sketches by well-known individuals. Some are signed, others are initialled, and many have been identified by art historians. They include the *Onchan Pioneer*, *Sefton Review* and *Camp*. References to individuals have been extracted from them and entered into our internee database. Families may often have a copy of these, not realising that their relative contributed to it.

Artwork comes to light in a wide variety of forms – from painting on newspaper sheets to art paper or boards. Internees were resourceful in using any material they could lay their hands on and some could afford to purchase materials from local sources.



This charming card was drawn by six-year-old William (Werner) Bergman while in Rushen Camp with his mother and sent to his father in Central Camp. William and family members revisited the Island in 2009. The card is reproduced with his permission, MS 11497.<sup>15</sup>

Examples of wooden sculptures<sup>16</sup> and plaques have survived too and a photograph of sculptor Ernst Blensdorf working on one piece in his room in Hutchinson Camp has been published.<sup>17</sup> There are also examples of postcards and greetings cards being sent by internees to friends or relatives such as one for 'Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year' produced by the Printing Office Mooragh Camp.<sup>18</sup>

In the women's camp, a large variety of toys, knitted and knotted items were produced and some examples have turned up, retained by the children for whom they were made. In 2008 we learned of the survival of a knitted cardigan and tie made by the parents of a child internee. Such items are rare as, apart from some gloves, little has survived, even though knitting was a popular activity.<sup>19</sup>

**Registration books, Aliens Tribunal letters and Permits**

Everyone was issued with an Aliens Registration book on arrival in Britain or on reaching the age of 16. They retained this until they emigrated, were naturalised or the system was cancelled around 1960. It was a requirement to register with the local police and, every time an Alien moved, the book was stamped and permissions for certain activities were sometimes recorded. They are similar to

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a modern passport. Some families have kept them and they will tell you in which district an individual lived.



Cover of a typical book with the page showing release from Central Camp.

The Aliens Tribunals were appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the position of all Germans and Austrians aged over 16. An example letter<sup>20</sup> from a London Tribunal gives the addressee, issuing police station, location and date of tribunal and has the following wording:

### Metropolitan Police.

*Tribunals have been appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the position of all Germans and Austrians over the age of 16 in this country, and to consider which of them can properly be exempted from internment and which of those exempted from internment can be exempted also from the special restrictions which are imposed by the Aliens Order on enemy aliens, i.e., the restrictions on traveling without a travel permit, on change of residence without the permission of the police, and of the possession without a police permit of certain articles including motor cars, cameras, etc.*

*If you are well-known to a British subject or to someone who has lived here a long time or are in employment of such person, you should ask such person to state in writing what he or she knows about you, and should bring the statement with you. You can also invite such a person to attend in case the tribunal wants to put any questions to him or her.*

*Legal; representatives (solicitors or barristers) will not be allowed to act as advocates before the tribunal.*

*M.P. – 18923/20,000 Sept./1939 w116 (2)*

The movement of Aliens from the Island

either on release or when returning from visits to internees was controlled by the issue from IOM Government Office of 'A permit for Alien to leave the Island'. They give the full name and address of the internee, where they are travelling, date of issue, and date of travel.<sup>21</sup>

Travel was usually by means of the IOM Steam Packet Company vessels, initially from Liverpool. After the *Victoria* hit a mine in the Mersey on 27 December 1940, services were diverted to Fleetwood. Initially, large numbers were shipped in 1940, as noted in the official record book of the *Rushen Castle*,<sup>22</sup> one of the two steamers used during the war. This records that between 11 and 22 June over 4,000 internees were shipped to the Island. Conditions were cramped and basic and some crossings are remembered as extremely rough, this being in addition to the worry of encountering a U-boat.

### Military records

Once the initial panic of internment had settled, internees were allowed to apply for their release if they met certain categories on an official list. One way of speeding this up was to volunteer for the Pioneer Corps. A register of enlistments has survived and a copy was kindly provided by Helen Fry. This register can potentially provide the crucial service number and note a transfer later in the war to active service units. Those who joined regular service units (especially if commissioned) will appear in military records and in an increasing number of online databases. Service records, particularly those of the Pioneer Corps, often note changes of name, which may be the only way in some cases to verify any change.

### Personal diaries and papers

These can contain invaluable information about camps and conditions therein. Henry Mendel,<sup>23</sup> held in Central Camp, wrote an account in which he included a sketch map showing the house numbers. Many will have seen the 'Who Do You Think You Are' BBC TV episode a few years ago about David Baddiel, whose grandfather, Ernst Fabian from Königsberg, was held on the Island. David had numerous letters but at the time we were unable to identify the house his relative was in. Thanks to this diary, we can now do so.

We have also received the papers of Cyril R. Cuthbert, the commandant at Rushen Camp, which include greetings from internees on special occasions.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, we also have the papers of a camp supervisor at Onchan, Hans Beermann, some of his items having been lent for use in the 'Living with the Wire' exhibition in 1994.<sup>25</sup>

### Reminiscences and biographies

Sometimes families publish details on the internet, a good example being the

site for the Austrian composer Hans Gal, who, while interned, composed music for the revue 'What a Life' (<http://hansgal.com/>). Such accounts can potentially link into other families or expand on events obliquely mentioned in notes and letters. Hans Gal also recorded an interview which is in the Imperial War Museum collection, of which the Manx Museum Library has a transcript.<sup>26</sup>

Whenever I see a new or second-hand book concerning internment, I look at the references and bibliography, if any, to see if there is anything else we should add to the collections. It is amazing how many times an apparently slight reference in one account links to another and then makes far more sense.

### Photographs

These are generally rare. Examples have survived of a few individuals, including lovely ones of activities in the women's camp, from the papers of Methodist Minister Rev Harry Johnson.<sup>27</sup> There are also official photographs published in the contemporary press and in official reports. In addition, there are a number of identifiable pictures in the report produced by John Barwick in 1941.<sup>28</sup> If any reader has photographs taken in the camps, we would be very interested to see them, especially if individuals can be identified.



Performance of 'Everyman', Easter 1941



Darmstadt Sisters with internee children

### Oral history

A number of internees have recorded their experiences for the Imperial War Museum and individuals, including members of the AJR, continue to give talks to groups such as schoolchildren. One of the most common remarks anyone working in family history hears is 'I wish I had asked

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them before they died.' Film and oral testimonies are very important and every encouragement should be given to make such a record while you can.

As an example, in a recent interview by researcher Amanda Sebestyen with AJR Life President Ludwig Spiro, he was able to recollect the general arrangement of houses in Onchan Camp and mark these on a map of the camp. Such memories enable us to identify exactly where an individual was in a camp. For example, he mentions individuals such as the artist Jack Bilbo and the writer Leo Kahn.<sup>29</sup>

The BBC has recorded some oral testimonies such as that given by Ruth Lansley (née Kormes) in 2005 as part of the 'Hometruths' series.<sup>30</sup> There are also testimonies in the archive of 'WW2 Peoples War' pages by former internees.<sup>31</sup>

### Exhibitions and re-enactments

Since the Manx Museum staged 'Living with the Wire' in 1994 and produced an accompanying booklet, interest in internment has continued unabated. The 'Two Sisters' exhibition in 2002 at the Manx Museum by Julia Winckler focused on her grandmother and great-aunt and also generated much interest.<sup>32</sup> We have since lent material to various exhibitions, including 'Forced Journeys' at the Ben Uri Gallery/London Jewish Museum of Art in 2009. Also, an exhibition is provisionally planned for 2015 to mark the 75th anniversary of the opening of the camps.

The IOM Arts Council sponsored a re-enactment of women's experiences called 'Wire and Wool' in 2005. This stimulated interest both among local residents who experienced the events of the time and former internees.<sup>33</sup>

### National Archives in London

Some records relating to individuals survive, but a recent podcast by Roger Kershaw regarding internment mentioned the fact that certain records are closed for 85 years and can be accessed only on request under the Freedom of Information Act ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/podcasts/39061-play.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/podcasts/39061-play.htm)).

Many of those who remained in Britain after the war eventually naturalised to become British citizens and these records may provide additional details. An official certificate was issued and an example from 1947 gives the full name, place and date of birth, previous nationality, marital status, name of wife or husband, and the names and nationality of parents.<sup>34</sup> A series of these from 1949-86 is in HO 334; an information sheet on how to locate them is available on the National Archives site.<sup>35</sup>

A series of camp nominal rolls for 1943-45 exists in the National Archives as part of TNA 215 and copies of these are held in

the Manx Museum.<sup>36</sup> They do not include the Peveril Camp in Peel (probably closed for 85 years) and were compiled after the release of most Jewish internees so are of no help for the peak years 1940-41.

### Isle of Man Government official records and publications

These include the records of the Isle of Man Constabulary, but a researcher also pointed out to me the wealth of background information about the administration of the camps available in the 1940-45 IOM Government Circulars. Recently, a set of plans for the original areas requisitioned for the camps linked to these circulars came to light in the IOM PRO.<sup>37</sup> These circulars include the setting up and closure of camps, the food (including kosher food) supplied to internees, medical and dental provision, aid for destitute internees, payment for work on farms and clerical duties. These are a mine of information to help flesh out the internee experience.

### The media

During the war there were reports of activities in camps both for and against the internees. It is sometimes possible to find references to individuals, especially if they came to public notice for any particular reason.

Many of the UK nationals are rolling out online access to their back issues including:

*The Times* [www.archive.timesonline.co.uk/toll/archive/](http://www.archive.timesonline.co.uk/toll/archive/)

*The Guardian* [www.archive.guardian.co.uk](http://www.archive.guardian.co.uk)

*Daily Express* [www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/?sf=express](http://www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/?sf=express)

All Isle of Man newspapers up to December 1960 except the *Isle of Man Daily Times* are currently being digitised. Once they are completed, it will be possible to search them for events and individuals. The method for public access to this resource has not yet been confirmed.

There is also film footage of internees and snippets continue to be shown on historical programmes. These are probably sourced from the Imperial War Museum or organisations such as Pathé Archive.

### The work of researchers

The scope for research into internment is wide and sometimes a new angle brings to light fresh material. The current research of Jan Buresova into Czech refugees<sup>38</sup> turned up in our collections a copy of a journal produced in Rushen Camp and a copy of *Hamacabbi*, a Czech-language news sheet. In this was an article by Lucy Borchardt, who managed to move to the Island, although not as an internee, whilst her daughter Ruth was interned. Ruth started the service exchange scheme in the women's camp and is quite well known. We found a registration card for Lucy in a separate non-internee aliens sequence.

### Reports into camps produced by other agencies

The International Committee of the Red Cross commissioned reports into conditions in Manx internment camps during the Second World War. The Library has copies of 13 of these.<sup>39</sup>

I do hope this guide will encourage some of you to look again at your family history. MNH Library would be pleased to hear from you or assist you in any way we can.

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<sup>1</sup> A summary version is available on the AJR website.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Wuga was interned at the age of 14 in 1940 though the minimum age was 16.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most important is that of the National Archives at Kew: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/)

<sup>4</sup> 'Arrival of the Aliens - first batch to land on the Island', *Ramsey Courier*, 28 May 1940, p. 2. The *IOM Examiner* of 1 June 1940, p. 4 notes that '3,671 Enemy Aliens arrive - 823 men for Mooragh Camp and nearly 3,000 women and children for Port Erin'.

<sup>5</sup> In Archives of the IOM Constabulary, MS 09310.

<sup>6</sup> A copy of the Pioneer Corps enrolment list has been deposited as MS 11791 by Helen Fry.

<sup>7</sup> From a card sent by Kurt Treitel, MS 11497.

<sup>8</sup> MS 11293. The printed booklet *Home Office Orders for Internment Camps up to 30 June 1943* includes the following codes: Ballaquane Hospital ZR; Falcon Cliff Hospital ZM; Hutchinson P; Mooragh Germans L; PortErin (Women) W; Port Erin (Married couples) Y.

<sup>9</sup> Papers of W. A. Steiner, MS 11882

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Nicola Tooms, 23 July 2008; notes and coins 2008-0245/1-3 and 2008-0246/1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Erich Wolfsberg, 1884-1956, exhibitor at the Royal Academy.

<sup>12</sup> The portrait was done on newspaper and is preserved by his son Morris along with a presentation booklet given to him on his release and other mementos of his time in Ramsey. Morris, born in Douglas in 1940 while his mother was interned, visited the Island with his daughter from the US in 2009. Illustrations reproduced by kind permission of the family.

<sup>13</sup> MS 11271-

<sup>14</sup> DVD in MS 11497. Oscar Fehr 1871-1959.

<sup>15</sup> The card is reproduced with his permission, MS 11497.

<sup>16</sup> An example is a carved wooden female figurine inscribed 'Hutchinson Camp Nov 40 J. Schreiner', which is in private hands.

<sup>17</sup> In Ernst Blensdorf (1896-1976): A Retrospective Exhibition at King's School, Bruton, 4 July-1 August 2008: Catalogue. It shows him carving the panel 'The Lovers' seated in a dormer window in Hutchinson Square.

<sup>18</sup> MS 11018 sent by Eugen Winckler and stamped 24.12.1940.

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence in MS 11497.

<sup>20</sup> An example on file is a letter sent to the mother of Werner Martin Bergman in 1939.

<sup>21</sup> An example issued to Lisbeth Brainin to return to London in August 1940 was copied to us by Jussi Brainin in 2008.

<sup>22</sup> MS 09692/23/4.

<sup>23</sup> MS 12140, originally written in German and transcribed by his daughter, deposited in 2009.

<sup>24</sup> MS 11196.

<sup>25</sup> MS 11716.

<sup>26</sup> MNH SA 0274.

<sup>27</sup> MS 09378. Papers of Harry Johnson, Methodist Minister Port St Mary, relating to his involvement with the Rushen Internment Camp, 1940-45.

<sup>28</sup> M 23044, Report on Alien Internment Camps in the UK April 1941.

<sup>29</sup> MS 12144.

<sup>30</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hometruths/20050905\\_ruth.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hometruths/20050905_ruth.shtml)

<sup>31</sup> Under subheading internment [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

<sup>32</sup> See MS 10688 for a summary of the project.

<sup>33</sup> MS 11289. The papers of the IOM Arts Council community worker Peggy Riley who wrote and directed the re-enactment.

<sup>34</sup> Issued to A. Lorch and daughter. National Archives HO 334/232 contains 500 duplicate certificates of naturalisation issued in 1947-48.

<sup>35</sup> [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/citizenship-and-naturalisation.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/citizenship-and-naturalisation.htm)

<sup>36</sup> MS 11551. Six camps: Hutchinson, Metropole, Mooragh, Onchan, Women's, Married.

<sup>37</sup> Examples of these are included in the second article.

<sup>38</sup> MS 12174.

<sup>39</sup> MS 12105.