

Prisoner of War Camps



*Prisoner of war camps in the UK: German PoWs somewhere in England bring in the harvest.
Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images*

What would happen if the UK's prison population suddenly increased by 400,000 people? That's what occurred between 1939 and 1948, when thousands of Germans, Ukrainians and others became Britain's prisoners of war, according to a new book.

The camps where the PoWs were imprisoned have largely (but not all) disappeared. At one time hundreds of them were spread across the UK.

The best known was Island Farm in Wales - scene of a 'great escape' in 1945, with some German POWs getting as far as Birmingham and Southampton.

Author Sophie Jackson has written a book, *Churchill's Unexpected Guests*, examining this overlooked period of Britain's history, looking at what happened to every camp from the period.

"Researching POW camp locations proved a challenge when compiling Churchill's Unexpected Guests. Few official lists of camps or prisoners remain from that time and most camps were temporary and pulled down after the war. Some have subsequently been built on.

Most modern camp lists are based on archaeological work – ironic when the camps existed a mere 60 years ago. English Heritage has worked hard to find the locations of camps, but even so many are still undiscovered.

Records from the time give an insight into camp life and sometimes reveal the name of a camp, but often the documents didn't reveal the actual address, and prisoners were not allowed to write their camp address on any letters they sent home.

Despite the difficulties a great number of camps have been identified, including the few listed here. Some were more famous than others, such as Island Farm Camp, Bridgend from which an audacious escape attempt was made by German prisoners.

Over the coming years no doubt more camps will be added to this list as they are discovered, but many will remain forgotten forever, the last traces of their Nazi occupants long lost.”

The English Heritage research referred to by Sophie was conducted by Roger Thomas and published in 2003.

Thomas says the full list is still not complete:

“Although there is a numeric sequence of 1,026 PoW Camps, there is no indication that this total was ever fully utilised. Substantial gaps exist in the sequence that are common to all sources consulted. Nevertheless, a number of sites have been located that remain unidentified and presumably fitted into the sequence somewhere.”

Some sites comprised more than one facility. Thanks to English Heritage, we are allowed to reproduce that list.

Extract of List connected to Wiltshire

Name & Location	County	Country	Notes
Le Marchant Camp, Devizes	Wiltshire	England	Barracks
Easton Grey Camp, Malmesbury	Wiltshire	England	Standard Type. Light Industrial and agricultural use.
Eden Vale Camp, Westbury	Wiltshire	England	Standard type. Site occupied by housing
Military Hospital, Lydiard Park, Purton	Wiltshire	England	
Lydiard House, Lydiard Millicent, Swindon	Wiltshire	England	Camp associated with Military Hospital
Lopscombe Corner Camp, Salisbury	Wiltshire	England	Precise location not identified
Ashton Gifford Camp, Godford, ** Warminster	Wiltshire	England	There is a great deal of uncertainty about this site, the only Godford listed by the OS is situated in Devon.
Stratton Factory Camp, Swindon	Wiltshire	England	Precise location not identified
Hill Camp, Westbury	Wiltshire	England	Precise location not identified
Aliwell Barracks, North Tidworth	Wiltshire	England	Precise location not identified

** Note – Should read Ashton Gifford, Codford, Warminster

(*The Guardian* – Monday 8 November, 2010)