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12 August 2025

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**The Asia-Pacific War at 80: the importance of when**

*By Oliver Moxham*

The 15<sup>th</sup> August is internationally recognised as the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the end of the Second World War. However, there is far less consensus around when the conflict started. Guest editor Oliver Moxham considers how something as simple as a year can be an indicator of dissonant narratives across conflict heritage sites in Japan.

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**Cover photo: Oliver Moxham**  
Memorial compass allowing the visitor to face territories where Imperial Japanese soldiers fought and died overseas. Tokyo War Dead Memorial, 2024.

## The Asia-Pacific War at 80: the importance of when

Oliver Moxham. Archaeology PhD Candidate and guest editor.



Image (top to bottom): Kyoto Museum for World Peace English pamphlet; Tokyo War Dead Memorial compass; from Aoki & Yasukuni Jinja (2017) Yasukuni Jinja - Record in pictures of Yushukan.

80 years ago (from the time of writing), the 393<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Squadron were preparing to fly over Hiroshima for the first ever offensive use of a nuclear bomb on the 6<sup>th</sup> August. Shortly followed by the bombing of Nagasaki on the 9<sup>th</sup> August, these two attacks were directly referenced by Emperor Hirohito in his public declaration on the 15<sup>th</sup> August of “a new and most cruel bomb” which would result in the “ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation,” necessitating surrender. The news spread globally, and VJ-Day celebrations were held across Allied nations as the relief of war’s end had finally been realized. Since then, the 15<sup>th</sup> August has been internationally commemorated as the anniversary of the end of the Second World War. However, while there may be consensus on when the war ended, the start of the conflict has become a much more contentious matter.

In June, I attended a history conference marking the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWII at King’s College London, where the opening panel held at the National Army Museum posed the question: when did the war start? I was initially elated, as I expected discussion on how conflict had begun much earlier than the Euro-American-centric consensus of 1939. I was soon disappointed, however, as debate centred around the earlier aggressive moves made by Nazi Germany against their neighbours, or whether it could be called a world war before American involvement in 1941. Thankfully, I was not the only Japan-focussed researcher there, and there was some limited discussion on the Asian side of the Second World War. However, speaking with colleagues after the panel, even we could not agree on when the war began.

One stated 1937, with the official declaration of war between the Empire of Japan and the Republic of China, but I had to disagree based on the numerous Japanese conflict heritage sites I had visited on fieldwork. I felt strongly on the matter, as at these sites something as simple as the starting year could be the only indicator of the ideology held by heritage managers in a conflict heritage landscape fraught with controversy.

I lived in Kyoto and then Tokyo from August 2023 to August 2024, doing critical narrative analysis of conflict heritage sites in both cities. My aim was to observe how visitors understood these sites through 'interpretive tours', and my first hurdle was how to present them to prospective tour attendees without forcing my own interpretation. Writing the English website promoting the tours was easy enough, explaining to unfamiliar international visitors how the Asia-Pacific War preceded the Second World War. The Japanese translation of the website proved much more challenging, as my analysis of Japanese conflict heritage narratives revealed that simply naming and dating the conflict was to fly one's ideological flag. Speaking casually with neighbours about the conflict only muddied the waters further, leading to a list of potential names and dates:

Japanese term	Translation	Date	Narrative context
第二次世界大戦	The Second Great World War	1939-45	International and most neutral term for the conflict, starting with Nazi Germany's declaration of war.
太平洋戦争	The Pacific War	1941-45	Used in nationalist narratives to focus on Japan-US conflict, particularly the defensive later years, ignoring Japanese aggression in Asia.
大東亜戦争	Greater East Asian War	1937-45	Used in nationalist narratives. Acknowledges war in Asia but cuts off earlier Japanese military aggression.
十五年戦争	The Fifteen-Year War	1931-45	Used in progressive narratives to highlight aggressive Japanese expansionism. Dates from the Mukden Incident (1931), the invasion of Manchuria and start of Japanese military action in China.
先の大戦	The last big war	???-1945	Colloquialism which came up conversationally to vaguely refer to the Second World War without referring to specifics.

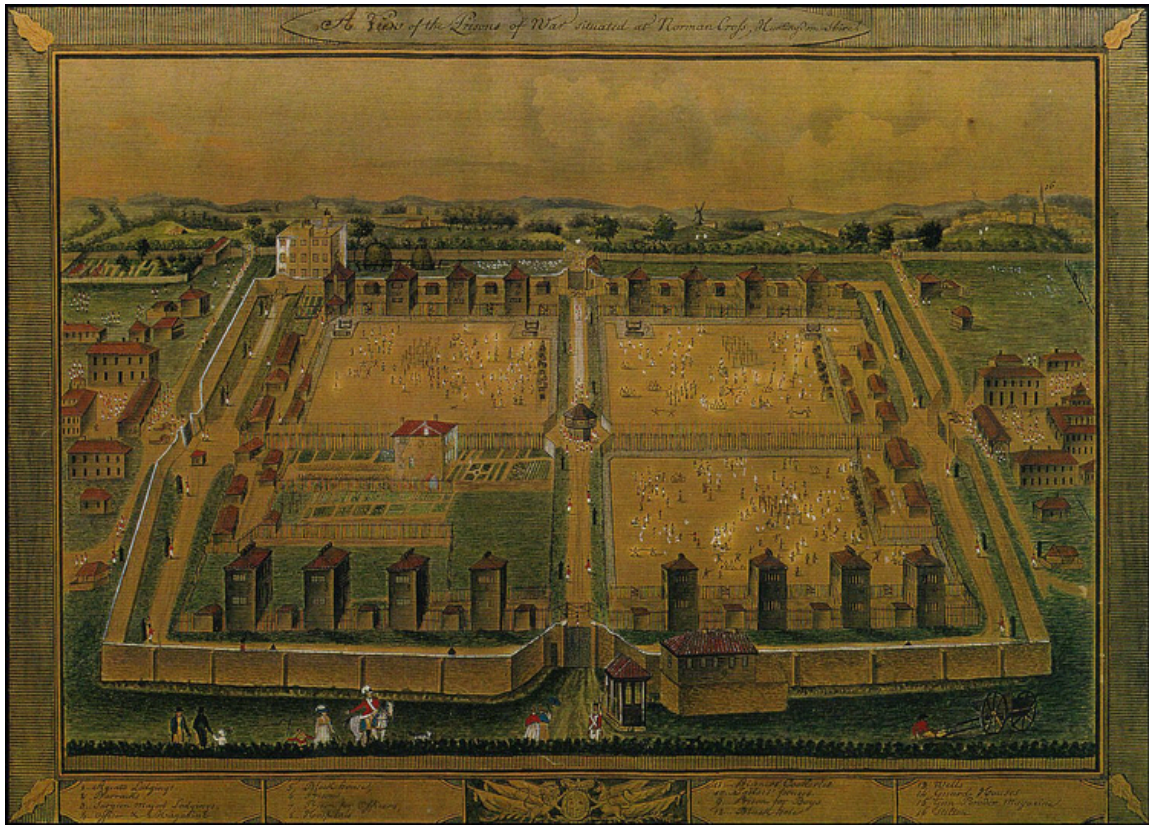
Such was the strength of ideological connotation that if I used the wrong term in the wrong company, they would quickly attempt to correct me, or the conversation promptly ended altogether. The experience contrasted greatly with my education on the Second World War growing up in the UK, with one agreed upon term and starting date. This cultural difference supported my research in demonstrating the comparatively dissonant nature in war memory and narratives. However, I couldn't help but reflect on what the monolithic nature of British war memory had on how the conflict is remembered here, and how different date ranges could highlight forgotten aspects. For example, if we were to remember a chapter of the war from 1942-45 and called it something like 'The War for the Asian Colonies', it could draw attention to the intense fighting between British and Japanese forces over British colonies in Asia. In British popular media, this episode has been presented primarily through films like *Bridge Over the River Kwai* (1957) and the brutal treatment of British Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) on Japanese military construction projects like the Thai-Burma Railway. Indeed, another date range for an alternative perspective on the conflict would be the construction and partial deconstruction of the railway (1942-46), as just as it had been built by British prisoners of war (and at least 250,000 civilian forced labourers), so too were segments deconstructed after the war under British supervision by Japanese prisoners of war, capturing the cyclical nature of violence and vengeance.

All these terms and examples demonstrate the importance of when in commemorating conflict: *when* denotes *where*, which determines *what* gets remembered and forgotten. Managers of heritage conflict can be understood as semiotic translators in their capacity to elicit different narratives and affective responses from the same material. I have seen the same Imperial Japanese Army medals used to defend and decry historical actors responsible for colonialism and military aggression, depending on the manager's translation. Perhaps it is impossible to tell all sides of an artefact's story within the context of one heritage site. In any case, we can recognise that the boundaries of narrative – and, by extension, authorized heritage discourse – begin with something as simple as a date.

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Oliver Moxham is a 3<sup>rd</sup>-year PhD Candidate in Archaeology at the Cambridge Heritage Research Centre. His published works have explored the impact of semiotic and lingual translation of conflict heritage, particularly around Japanese heritage sites on the Asia-Pacific War. His PhD attempts to understand how different translation methods lead to different visitor interpretations through multilingual discourse analysis of interpretive tour surveys and Google Maps reviews. Forthcoming articles look at: the role of semiotic markers like the Nanjing Massacre in eliciting dissonant interpretations ([Archaeological Review from Cambridge](#)); the potential of online ethnography for understanding public interpretation of heritage ([Heritage, Memory and Conflict](#)); and an overview UK-Japanese war commemoration and reconciliation 80 years post-war ([Sainsbury Institute Occasional Papers](#)). See his [ORCID profile](#) for more details.





## Local conflict heritage: world's first P.O.W. camp in Cambridgeshire added to National Trust

Scheduled monument Norman Cross has been acquired by Nene Park Trust through funding from Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The site in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, is the earliest known purpose-built prisoner-of-war camp, constructed to hold captured French soldiers during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) and Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815).

20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts have made POW camps infamous for poor quality of life and treatment, such as mass starvation in Boer War camps (1900-02) or high mortality rates at Japanese camps along the Thai-Burma Railway (1942-45). Norman Cross, on the other hand, was a self-sustaining town with its own barracks, offices, hospital, school, marketplace, and even a banking system. Supplies for POWs were paid for by France, and internees were even taught to read and write in French and English and allowed to put on plays by Voltaire.

The grant will see the site become a green space open to the public, sharing its history while contributing to community well-being. Over 800 POW artefacts are on display at the [Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery](#).

[Learn more](#)

*Image: Painting of Norman Cross. 1797. Artist Unknown. Public domain.*



Vagina Museum @vaginamuseum.bsky.social · 6d

Let's try that again, since our last attempt at making this post got flagged...

Immunocompromised? Covid conscious? Friday mornings are masked mornings here at the Vagina Museum. Admission, as always, is free [www.vaginamuseum.co.uk/accessmornings](http://www.vaginamuseum.co.uk/accessmornings)

This is the Vagina Museum's placeholder share image.

Social media apps erroneously flag our links as "adult content". This leads to our content being censored.

Education is not for adults only.

## Safe from what? Online safety and censored museums

On the 25<sup>th</sup> July, a deadline set by Ofcom came into effect in the UK, requiring websites to conform to the [Online Safety Act](#) by enforcing age verification where visitors might be exposed to vaguely defined "harmful" content. A key focus of the act has been to prevent children from accessing pornographic content. However, the broad-strokes approach to what content requires blocking has led to confusion and arbitrary restrictions on non-pornographic material.

[The Vagina Museum](#) has felt their usual struggle with online censorship ramp up since the act's deadline passed. First opened in London in 2017, the museum strives for a "world where no one is ashamed of their bodies" through the unerotic display of genitalia-based art. Now, they struggle to post anything without being reported for harmful content, highlighting the slippery slope of censorship: a blanket ban of harmful content can end up doing more harm itself by shutting down discourse around the topic. With the added costs of age verification, cash-strapped museums seeking to educate on controversial topics have been dealt a blow to their capacity for public engagement.

[Learn more](#)

Image: Vagina Museum Bluesky account (1/8/25).



National Conference on  
Cultural Property Protection

# REGISTRATION

# OPEN



National Conference on Cultural Property Protection



Sept. 22 – 24, 2025  
Washington, DC

Join us in our nation's capital  
for three days to learn from  
experts dedicated to  
safeguarding cultural property.

[Register Here](#)



## 1945–2025: From the Metal of War to the Metal of Peace A Ceremony to Celebrate Heritage as a Builder of Peace

26 November, 16:00

Auditorium al Duomo, Via de' Cerretani 54/r, Florence (Italy)



### An Invitation to Remember, Reflect and Rebuild

In 2025, the world commemorates 80 years since the end of World War II and the birth of UNESCO. At the same time, we mark 50 years of COMI SpA's dedication to "Welcome and Hospitality," and the 50th anniversary of Paolo Del Bianco as CEO — the man behind the vision that gave life to Life Beyond Tourism®. In this moment of global fragility, we reaffirm our commitment to peace, dialogue, and the role of heritage as a catalyst for a more harmonious future.

### The Ceremony: STUPORE in the Life Beyond Tourism® Philosophy

At the heart of this gathering is the unveiling of "STUPORE", a 300-kg bronze sculpture designed by Paolo Del Bianco and crafted under his coordination in Pietrasanta, Italy, known for its artistic tradition.

The sculpture embodies five core concepts:

- The tools of dialogue
- The spread of good practices
- The power of encounter
- World Heritage Sites
- and the reawakening of Wonder (STUPORE), for Peace in the World, that we all share.

### Presentation of the Renewed International Appeal: Heritage for Building Peace 2025

The event will culminate with the official presentation of the renewed International Appeal "Heritage for Building Peace 2025", an evolution of the appeal launched in 2019 during the 43rd UNESCO World Heritage Committee session in Baku.

This renewed call invites the global community to recognize the responsibility of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in promoting intercultural dialogue, inclusive economies, and peace — not only as custodians of memory, but as active builders of a common future.

[Register Here](#)

## The World in Florence - Heritage: Peace & Move

27-28 November  
Florence (Italy)



The 2025 edition of The World in Florence marks the fifth and final year of this first cycle. A meaningful milestone that we have chosen to dedicate to the highest purpose of our mission: fostering dialogue for peace among cultures through the shared value of heritage.

This year, more than ever, we want to offer that same space to listen to your voices and shape the event around the themes that matter most to you. By doing so, we aim to strengthen the role of Learning Communities as centers of awareness—places where individuals can engage in dialogue-based initiatives and contribute to the creation of a culture of peace.

If you are interested in taking part in TWIF 2025 as an active participant, please read the possible discussion topics that will be discussed at the event tables and prepare the required material for a constructive and useful debate to bring about real change in your local community. Once you have prepared your material, proceed with buying the ticket (€270) and you will receive the link to the registration form to fill out.

[Register Here](#)

## ICCROM Virtual Conference in AI and Heritage

Submit by 20 August  
Conference 20-21 November



Call for Papers

International Virtual  
Conference  
**Ctrl+S Culture: AI  
and Heritage in a  
Digital World**

Share your research, tools, or creative  
ideas on AI and heritage.

Submit by:

- 1 July 2025 (Keynotes & Panels)
- 20 August 2025 (All others)

[Submit your Abstract](#)

[Learn More](#)



## Conference: Lessons from the Past

23-24 March 2026

Call for papers now open (deadline TBC)



### **Digging into the past to build a sustainable future**

Humanity faces unprecedented challenges, or does it?

People who study the past have a unique and broad perspective on humanity. With the challenges of the modern world, this deep understanding has never been more important in shaping our attitudes and responses.

The University of Liverpool department for Archaeology, Classics, and Egyptology (ACE), in partnership with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Sustainability Research (ICSR) and Victoria Gallery and Museum, invite abstract and poster submissions for the hybrid conference “Lessons from the Past: UN Sustainability Goals” to be held on the 23rd and the 24th March, 2026.

Talks must result in a tangible recommendation to a specified body (e.g. a non-profit institution, local council, University, Government department, or even the United Nations). Presentations should explain how knowledge of the past supports the recommendation. Talks will be selected based on the feasibility of their recommendation and strength of linkage between the proposal made and the evidence used to support it. Poster submissions do not require a recommendation but should include relevant information linking knowledge of the past with a specific UN sustainability goal.

We are keen to hear from a broad range of speakers and welcome submissions from Archaeologists, Evolutionary anthropologists, Historians, Classicists, Egyptologists, and anyone else who studies humans in the past. Submitted abstracts will be blind reviewed.

[More details here](#)



## Arts Research Fellowship

8 September 2025

### Jesus College Cambridge

Jesus College, Cambridge invites applications each year for two stipendiary Research Fellowships in the following subjects: Archaeology, Classics, History of Art, Linguistics, Music, Philosophy, and Politics. The Fellowships will normally be tenable for three years from 1 October 2026.

This Fellowship is intended for researchers early in their careers. Successful candidates are expected to be either graduate students, probably in the latter stages of their research leading to a PhD Degree, or post-doctoral researchers who have recently been awarded their PhD Degree. The College expects to select a person with an excellent record of research in their chosen subject and the potential to pursue that research at the highest level.

The stipend for a Research Fellow is set by reference to the University of Cambridge salary scale and subject to any increases in that scale. Step 35 (£32,428) is applied over the three years of the Fellowship. The College is able to assist in the provision of subsidised accommodation for Research Fellows (valued at approximately £3,556 per year). The College will pay a 'bench fee', of the order of £12k pa (subject to annual review), to allow a Research Fellow to access University Department facilities.

[Learn More](#)

## AHRC funding: Cultural heritage and climate change networks to drive policy change

14 October 2025

Apply for Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) funding to maximise the international partnership brokering and networking policy opportunities of UK arts and humanities research, as a step towards the Horizon Europe Resilient Cultural Heritage Partnership.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your project can be up to £60,000. AHRC will fund 80% of the FEC.

Projects will be funded up to a maximum of 12 months and must start on 1 February 2026 and must be completed by 31 January 2027.

[Learn more](#)





## Short Course: International Cultural Heritage Law

25 September -  
23 October 2025

### **British Institute of International and Comparative Law (BIICL)**

The BIICL is currently accepting registrations for our International Cultural Heritage Law Course which we thought might be of interest to colleagues and contacts of The Cambridge Heritage Research Centre.

This course will offer an introduction to cultural heritage as an international legal concept. It will include discussions of the key threats to cultural heritage at present, including trafficking, armed conflicts, and development. In doing so, it will also cover international instruments that have been adopted over the past decades to protect cultural heritage. Finally, the course will conclude with a special session focused on restitution matters, considering past return processes and what can be learnt from them.

By the end of the course, participants will be able to understand:

- What is 'cultural heritage' under international law?
- How does international law protect cultural heritage?
- What is the role of States and non-state actors in protecting cultural heritage?
- How has the conceptualization of cultural heritage changed over time?

Training scholarships are available to enable individuals from communities currently under-represented in the legal field to take part. Applications for training scholarships must be received at least three weeks ahead of the course start date (4 September 2025)

[Learn more](#)





## Contribute

We would be especially interested in hearing from you about events and opportunities. Contributions in the form of short reviews of conferences, exhibitions, publications or other events/material that you have attended/read are also welcome. Please note that advertisements for any non-CHRC events, jobs, or programs do not imply endorsement of them.

## Subscribe

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For more information about the Heritage Research Group, visit the CHRC website:

[www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk](http://www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk)

# Cambridge Heritage Research Centre Bulletin

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