

**“Adolf Island”: The Nazi occupation of Alderney. By Caroline Sturdy Colls and Kevin Simon Colls. 2022. 488 pp. Manchester University Press, Manchester. ISBN 978-1-5261-4906-0.**

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*Adolf Island* is a fascinating account of a decade-long historical archaeology project studying the Nazi occupation of the island of Alderney. The challenge of such a study is to survey and interpret the vast body of material remains, the archives spread across numerous countries and the memory narratives recorded over the past eight decades. It is easy for such studies to become bogged down in the minutiae of chronology, historiographical arguments or the technical details of militaria. To their great credit Sturdy Colls and Colls have worked hard to place the victims of the Nazi occupation – the slaves and other labourers – at the core of their analysis and to forefront their lives and deaths without compromising the rigour and technical detail of their study.

Alderney’s World War II history, like that of the other Channel Islands, has a complicated and vigorously contested afterlife. While Jersey and Guernsey struggle with legacies of resistance, collaboration, deportations and deaths, Alderney was wholly evacuated before the Germans arrived. The arguments focus instead on the nature of the Nazi crimes, the presence or absence of concentration camps, and the thorny question of a “Holocaust on British soil”. Further complicating the picture, post-war investigations were coloured by complicated, nascent Cold War relations with the Soviet Union.

When the occupation forces left Alderney at the close of World War II, they left behind a vast material legacy in a small space. This included a landscape transformed beyond recognition by *Organisation Todt* concrete mega-structures and dotted with the camps and graves of the labourers who built them.

The introduction to *Adolf Island* sets the tone for the book as a whole, zooming in first on a single, named individual: Volodymyr Zaiats, a Ukrainian inmate of Sylt concentration camp on Alderney, was murdered by the SS in 1943. From this starting point the authors begin to outline the wartime history of Alderney, the material traces that remain and the previous efforts to study or understand them. They also highlight the widespread neglect of this heritage, and the apathy (at best) towards the preservation or memorialisation of sites of Nazi atrocities on the island. For the authors, cutting through these arguments, the former camps and forced labour sites are crime scenes to be investigated. Their aim is to produce ‘a comprehensive history [...] with a focus on the forced and slave labourers, and with a focus on materiality’ (p. 9).

*Adolf Island* is divided into four parts. The first, “Work”, looks at the occupiers’ aims for Alderney and how these shaped the experience of the workers. The extraordinary fortifications are often viewed in isolation as monuments; here they are brought back into context as the products of human agency, alongside a powerful humanisation of those worked to death in their creation. The second part, “Life”, examines the network of camps on Alderney, their development and functions, and the variety of experiences of those behind the wire. This is well-illustrated with maps, plans, photographs and portraits. Here and throughout the book there are text boxes telling the stories of individual prisoners, their lives and deaths, as far as they are known. In this section there is a great deal of original survey data and interpretations making up a very detailed account of the different stages of Alderney as a landscape of camps. The reproduction of full-colour images, including LiDAR data, photographs and 3D models, is welcome here: other publishers, please take note.

The third part, “Death”, deals with the highly controversial question of the numbers of deaths of prisoners and other labourers on Alderney. This includes a careful explanation of the different forms of recording used during and after the war, and the many difficulties these

present to historians. The majority of the dead on Alderney, many of them uncounted and unrecorded, were young eastern European men, worked to death or murdered by German guards. Surveys and studies of cemetery sites show a chaos of marked and unmarked graves, individual and mass burials, within and sometimes outside the boundaries of the cemeteries. The question of whether or how many bodies were disposed of into the sea remains uncertain, demonstrating the vagaries of folklore, memory and unreliable narrators.

The final section of the book, “Aftermath”, looks at the heritage of the Nazi occupation. This includes a critical review of British wartime and post-war investigations of occupation-era atrocities, by MI19 and other bodies, as well as by representatives of the Soviet Union. This reads as a fascinating microcosm of the confusions and emerging divisions in post-war Europe, as millions traversed the continent in search of home, refuge or surviving family, while the new occupying forces attempted to create frameworks for investigation and punishment of wartime crimes within a fast-changing political landscape. Chapter 11, “Legacies”, is a fascinating account of post-war Alderney’s reconstruction and the ongoing struggles to come to terms with the material and moral legacies of occupation. This provides important context for the consistent resistance to archaeological study of Nazi-era Alderney, a frustration that makes the resulting book all the more impressive.

*Adolf Island* builds on Caroline Sturdy Colls’ earlier, foundational work on the archaeology of the Holocaust, and like her previous writing, it features the close attention to detail and carefully weighed words needed when working on such viciously contested heritage. It is a remarkable piece of historical archaeological research and a model for work of this kind.