

Mynydd Epynt as an Event of Historic Welsh National Importance: A Re-evaluation of the 1940 Clearance

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ABSTRACT

The 1940 eviction of fifty-four Welsh-speaking families from Mynydd Epynt by the War Office to establish an army training area, known as 'Y Chwalfa' (The Clearance), resulted in the eradication of an entire way of life and the dispersal of a community. Despite its profound significance in modern Welsh history, the event remains academically understudied, lacking detailed analysis in a wider comparative context. This dissertation addresses a persistent nationalistic narrative that suggests the people of Epynt were treated less favourably than their English counterparts, who faced similar wartime evictions, and investigates whether the cultural and linguistic impact warrants reframing the clearance as an event of National importance, akin to the flooding of Tryweryn.

This study adopts a qualitative, inductive and comparative methodology, employing a bottom-up approach to construct a narrative of World War II-era War Office evictions. The research uses a phenomenological approach over a longitudinal time horizon and is supported by autoethnography, including Person Informal Observation (P.I.O.) at the sites. The case studies selected through purposive sampling are Mynydd Epynt in Powys and the contemporary English sites of Imber (Wiltshire) and Tyneham (Dorset). Data collection relies on memoirs, first-hand testimony, secondary publications, academic sources, and archival data from institutions such as St Fagans Museum.

The findings indicate that, contrary to the persistent narrative, the people of Mynydd Epynt received very similar treatment to their English contemporaries regarding the logistics of their wartime eviction. However, a less favourable outcome is observed in the post-eviction representation and treatment of the Epynt environment compared to Imber and Tyneham.

This dissertation argues that the cultural and linguistic impact caused by the clearance of Mynydd Epynt was of such a profound magnitude that the event should be reframed, and history should record it as an event of National importance.



FIG. 1. Llew E. Morgan, Y Bugaill, Epynt, 1960.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the people of Epynt, Imber, Tyneham and all the
'lost villages' who sacrificed their homes to help win a war.

"Mae'n ddiwedd byd yma..."

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List of Abbreviations

CDWC	Committee for the Defence of Welsh Culture
I.P.A.	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
M.O.D	Ministry of Defence
P.I.O.	Personal Informal Observation
SENTA	Sennybridge Training Area
UWTSD	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

Introduction

In 1939, in the early months of World War II, a remote upland farming community in mid-Wales was delivered what equated to a death sentence. Not by the enemy, but by the War Office who announced that Mynydd Epynt, an area of approximately 12,000 hectares in what is now Powys, was urgently required for the creation of an army training area.¹ The news was met with shock and disbelief by the predominantly Welsh speaking population, many of which had lived in tenanted farms on the mountain for generations.² By May 1940, a total of 219 people from 54 farms had been displaced, leaving the Army to take up a residence from which they have never left.³ It was not just a community that was destroyed, it was the eradication of an entire way of life. A community that once gathered at the school, the chapel and the Inn was dispersed, taking whatever farm tenancies became available in the wider area to continue farming and retain their livelihoods.⁴ These were dark days for the people of Epynt, protests and pleas were made but it was war time and sacrifice was everywhere.⁵ So too was confusion, lines of communication between the Ministry and the farmers were criticised.⁶ People understood, correctly or not, that they would return to their homes when hostilities ended.⁷ Additionally, a nationalistic aspect attached itself to 'Y Chwalfa' (Welsh: The Clearance), drawing parallels between the evictions and historical English invasions of Wales.⁸ Comparisons were made between the proportion of land requisitioned in Wales for war time purposes versus that in England and Scotland, planting the seed of a

¹'Mynydd Epynt', 'the Epynt' and 'Epynt' are all commonly used to describe the same geographical area. The history contained in this dissertation covers two mountains, Mynydd Epynt and Mynydd Bwlch-y-Groes, (both located within the army training area). Any reference to Epynt, also includes Mynydd Bwlch-y-Groes.,

Marianna, Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate, 1945 to the Present*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), p. 186.

² Gwynfor, Evans, and Plaid Cymru, *Havoc in Wales: The War Office Demands*, (Unknown Publisher, 1947), p.12.

³ Herbert, Hughes, *An Uprooted Community: A History of Epynt*, (Y Lofa Cyf., 1997), p. 86.

⁴ Ibid. p. 86.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 91-109.

⁶ British Newspaper Archive, "'Secrecy' is Epynt Farmers' Chief Complaint", *Western Mail and South Wales News*, 27 March 1940 <

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19400327/196/0007?browse=False> > [accessed 25 November 2025].

⁷ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p. 88.

⁸ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 167.

persistent narrative, that the people of Epynt were treated less favourably than their English counterparts.⁹ Despite its significance in modern Welsh history, the event remains relatively unknown and academically under-studied. The removal of these families fundamentally changed the course of their lives, and generations later the clearance remains a sensitive subject for their descendants. In recent year, however, the event has started to attract popular attention, comparing it to the drowning of Tryweryn by Liverpool Corporation in 1965.¹⁰

Literature

Much has been written about the clearance over the years, mostly anecdotal newspaper articles and web pages that seek to keep the memory of the community alive. Only two books have been published (excluding translations) which are dedicated to the history of Epynt and its community. The earliest of these is *Epynt Without People*, written by Ronald Davies some 30 years after the event.¹¹ In his book, Davies draws on his grandmother's diaries, his own personal experience along with contributions from other Epynt families to describe in detail life for the community prior to the clearance and fate of the families. However, by its very nature Davies' work is more memoir than document of historical fact and therefore subject to potential unconscious bias.

This limitation is recognised by Davies who apologises in his preface, '... for any mistakes or omissions that may have occurred'.¹² It took almost another thirty years before a further book was published about the Epynt, this time a scholarly contribution based on Davies' earlier work and historical research. *In An Uprooted Community: A History of Epynt*, Herbert Hughes highlights that Davies' work, written so long after the events may not always be 'wholly reliable', providing examples of facts from the book that he (Hughes) was unable to verify.¹³ Ronald Church's book, *Sennybridge Training Area 1940-1990*, contributes some additional information about the events surrounding the

⁹ Evans, *Havoc in Wales: The War Office Demands*, p. Inner front cover.

¹⁰ Wyn, Thomas, *Tryweryn: New Dawn?: The Legacy of the Drowning of Capel Celyn*, (Y Lolfa, 2023), pp. 16-47.

¹¹ Ronald, Davies, *Epynt Without People*, (Y Lolfa, 1984).

¹² Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p. 88.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 86.

clearance in addition to a post-war history of the training ground.¹⁴ Marianna Dudley's work, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate: 1945 To the Present*, published in 2012, is an excellent example of modern scholarship in which she has dedicated a chapter to Epynt, the acquisition of the land, and what she calls 'The Military Age' viewed through the lens of military environmentalism.¹⁵ Whilst these works establish a critical historiography of the event, none provides a detailed analysis of the requisition in a wider context.

Research Aims and Objectives

Beyond the published word and anecdotal history, the Epynt story possesses a further, yet untold, dimension: one of context and comparison. Firstly, a persistent narrative exists (some of which is politically motivated) suggesting the people of Epynt received less favourable treatment than their English counterparts, who also were evicted from their home to make way for army training grounds during World War II. Secondly, the research aims to determine the significance of the Epynt clearance on the Welsh language and culture, specifically whether it should be considered an event of National importance akin to the flooding of Tryweryn.

Therefore, the research question is: Were the people of Mynydd Epynt treated fairly when compared to a sample of their English contemporaries and what was the cultural and linguistic impact of the clearance. This dissertation will argue that the people of Epynt, when compared to like communities in England, received very similar treatment in the way in which the logistics of their evictions were managed. However, there are notable differences in how the removals have been represented, and the environments treated post-clearance, with Epynt having been dealt a less favourable hand. Furthermore, the cultural and linguistic impact caused by the clearance of Epynt was of such a profound magnitude that the event should be reframed, and history should record it as an event of National importance.

¹⁴ Roland, Church, *Sennybridge Training Area 1940-1990*, (Chas Hunt and Co., 1991).

¹⁵ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, pp. 179-194.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, inductive, interpretive and comparative methodology, using a bottom-up approach to build a narrative of World War II Ministry of Defence removals. The case studies are Mynydd Epynt, Imber (Wiltshire) and Tyneham (Dorset).

Research Philosophy and Approach

A phenomenological approach provides a grounded interpretation of events for comparative analysis. This is supported by autoethnography, validating the inclusion of the author's own experiences, referred to as 'Personal Informal Observation' (P.I.O.).

Case Studies and Sampling

Purposive sampling selected Imber and Tyneham for their similarity to Epynt, well-documented pre and post eviction history. and accessibility, which enabled the author to conduct P.I.O. See Appendix A.

Data Collection and Sources

The scarcity of public domain sources, likely due to wartime sensitivity, necessitated reliance on post-event memoirs and first-hand testimony. Secondary sources included academic databased (e.g. JSTOR, Google Scholar), national newspaper archives and publications. Further information was obtained by consulting multiple archives, museums (e.g. St Fagans Museum), and a local Epynt historian.

Data Analysis Techniques

Multi-method qualitative analysis techniques are used, including content analysis; thematic analysis; interpretative phenomenological analysis (I.P.A.); narrative analysis and autoethnographical analysis.

Limitations

The dissertation acknowledges potential memory distortion from reliance on post-event personal memoirs and inherent subjectivity introduced by the interpretive nature of the analysis. Unconscious bias stemming from both the purposive sampling and the author's native connection to the wider Epynt are also acknowledged.

Ethics approval

No ethical approval from UWTSD was required as the research methodology did not include any live interviews or questionnaires.

Summary

The methodology is justified by the study's need to interpret complex human experiences and historical narratives, requiring meaning to be constructed rather than measured. This approach provides the essential foundation and framework for data interpretation needed for the dissertation.

Chapter Structures

This study uses a four-chapter structure to emphasise the comparative analysis of the Epynt clearance and the argument for its unique cultural and national significance, as highlighted by the source material.

Chapter One – The Comparative Case Studies

Contextualises the three test cases detailing World War II land acquisition variables to establish a comparative baseline.

Chapter Two – The Logistics of Displacement

Compares the eviction logistics across all three locations to test the first part of the dissertation hypothesis – the people of Epynt received very similar treatment in the way in which the logistics of their removal was managed.

Chapter Three – The Post-War Legacy

Compares the post-war legacy across all three locations to test the second part of the dissertation hypothesis – the people of Epynt received less favourable treatment post-clearance.

Chapter Four – The National Metric

Compares the Epynt clearance with the flooding of Tryweryn to test the final part of the dissertation hypothesis - the Epynt clearance should be reframed as an event of National importance.

Chapter One: The Comparative Case Studies

- Defining the Research Environments



Gardiner, Map Showing the locations of the three test cases, May 2026

This chapter examines the three case studies to establish the empirical baseline for comparative analysis, noting any data disparities. These test cases involve World War II land acquisition, by the War Office, resulting in permanent civilian removal, replacing it with continuous military use.

History

The test cases are all geolocated in rural areas. Epynt on high uplands, Imber within a valley on wide open plains, and Tyneham in a coastal valley. Each of these is a location of significant historical importance. Epynt's ancient landscape contains Middle Bronze Age burial sites, a stone circle; important 14th century drovers' paths cross the mountain.¹⁶ Its name means 'Haunt of the Horse', derived from ancient Brythonic, an

¹⁶ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, pp. 16-19.,

"Tri Churgiau," n.d. <<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/sites/305015>> [accessed May 6, 2026].,

"Stone Circle" n.d. <<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/sites/92064>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

ancestor of the modern-day Welsh language.¹⁷ Imber which evolved from a Romano-British settlement, was recorded in the Domesday book as *Imemerie*.¹⁸ Similarly, Tyneham appears in the Domesday book as *Tigeham*; it is a short distance from Flowers Barrow, an Iron Age Hill Fort.¹⁹ That all three cases feature noteworthy histories is a crucial data point, as the presence of heritage artifacts may have influenced the War Office decision-making process and the subsequent management of the environments by the Army. Epynt, Imber and Tyneham all experienced depopulation in the first half of the 20th century, a broader trend that started in the mid/late 19th century.²⁰ Despite the depopulation, all test cases maintained a strong and vibrant community underpinned by, churches, chapels, schools, shops and inns.

Places of Worship

Epynt's community centered around the 1857 Methodist chapel, *Babell*, which, together with a small adjoining graveyard was located deep in the Epynt countryside.²¹ St. Giles church (a Grade I Listed Building) in Imber was a focal point for its community, overlooking the village the Anglican church with its surrounding churchyard was built in the 13th century.²² Imber also had a Baptist chapel, built circa 1839 with its own graveyard.²³ In Tyneham, the Anglican St Mary's Church (a Grade II Listed Building), parts of which date back to the 13th century, sits centrally within the village, encircled by its churchyard.²⁴ The active use of these religious spaces up until the removals makes this a strong data point for comparative analysis.

¹⁷ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 171.

¹⁸ Rex, Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, (Hobnut Press, 2001, p. 3., Anna, Powell-Smith, "Imber," Domesday Book, n.d. <<https://opendomesday.org/place/ST9648/imber/>> [accessed May 5, 2026].

¹⁹ Anna, Powell-Smith, "Tyneham," Domesday Book, n.d. <<https://opendomesday.org/place/SY8880/tyneham/>> [accessed May 5, 2026]., Robert, Westwood, *The Tyneham Story*, (Inspiring Places Publishing, 2014), p. 7.

²⁰ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p. 122.

Westwood, *The Tyneham Story*, p. 18.

²¹ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p. 153.

²² Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p23.,

"Church of St Mary, Steeple with Tyneham - 1470442," Historic England, n.d.

<<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1470442?section=official-list-entry>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

²³ "Imber Baptist Chapel," IMBER VILLAGE IN COLOUR, n.d, <<https://www.imber.org.uk/imber-baptist-chapel.html>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

²⁴ "Church of St Mary, Steeple with Tyneham - 1470442," Historic England, n.d.

<<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1470442>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

Schools

Cilieni school on Epynt closed in 1940 after fifty-seven years of service of educating pupils aged four to fourteen years, sixteen of which were on the register at the time the eviction notices were served.²⁵ Imber's National school was established in the 19th century teaching children up to age eleven and serving the community until the time of the Imber evictions.²⁶ Tyneham school was built in 1856, it taught children from four to fourteen years of age, its closure in 1932 was due to falling pupil numbers.²⁷ For the purpose of this comparative study, the fact that Tyneham did not have a functioning school at the time of the eviction is noted and discounted, due to the prior similarity to the schools at Epynt and Imber and the relatively recent closure date.

Amenities

In 1859 Tyneham's shop became a Post Office, continuing to serve the community until the time of the evictions.²⁸ Imber's Post Office opened in 1909, only closing when the villagers were evicted.²⁹ The village may also have had a shop, but records are unclear on this point.³⁰ Research has not identified a shop on Epynt but the personal memoirs of Roland Davies refer to a 'shop' that operated out of a private residence.³¹ Due to the lack of fully comparable records, this specific data point will be discounted from the study.

Inns and Public Houses

The Drovers Arms on Epynt owed its existence to the ancient practice of droving, where large numbers of cattle and sheep were walked by a drover from rural farms to be sold in Hereford or Shrewsbury.³² The Bell Inn in Imber appears on the Tithe Survey of 1838 and served the community until 'last orders were called for the final time due to the evictions'.³³ In his book, *Tyneham*, Rodney Legg writes, 'Tyneham, at the outbreak of

²⁵ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, pp. 66-73.

²⁶ "Saint Giles School," IMBER VILLAGE IN COLOUR, n.d., <<https://www.imber.org.uk/st-giles-school.html>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

²⁷ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 136.

²⁸ "3 the Row - the Post Office," Tyneham, January 3, 2019 <<https://tynehamopc.org.uk/places/tyneham/the-row/post-office/>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

²⁹ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p 29.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 65.

³¹ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p. 63.

³² Davies, *Epynt Without People*, pp. 38-42.,

"Drovers Arms," n.d. <<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/sites/307124>> [accessed May 6, 2026].

³³ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p41.

hostilities, was an ordinary little community, exceptional only in that it did not have a public house'.³⁴ Research has been unable to identify any public houses or inns in Tyneham prior to this date. Despite Tyneham lacking a public house, the presence of an Inn is considered a valid data point. Its inclusion is justified because the two examples (Epynt's Drovers Arms and Imber's Bell Inn) demonstrate the importance of this specific amenity.

Community Life

Roland Davies in his book, *Epynt Without People*, describes the social life of the people of Cilieni (a valley deep within Epynt), as being centred around the chapel, Babell.³⁵ Its annual events included a winter Eisteddfod and summer tea parties with sports. Also in the Winter, the school held whist drives to raise money for the children's Christmas party and trip to the seaside.³⁶ Herbert Hughes expands on this, explaining that the shared social experiences of the people of Epynt were fundamental to a sense of community that expressed itself with acts of neighbourly mutual support.³⁷ Imber had a long history of community celebrations that were held in a huge threshing barn at Imber Court Farm. At Christmas the school children would go carol singing and parties would be held for them at Imber Court, which also hosted the village fetes.³⁸

Lilian Bond (1887-1980) had close links to the village of Tyneham, it was her ancestral home.³⁹ In 1956, her book *Tyneham a Lost Heritage* was published in which she describes how the village had a tradition of 'home-grown' entertainment including plays and concerts, held in the village school that also housed the weekly Sunday School.⁴⁰ In describing the importance of these events to the community, Bond wrote, 'The common interests of a small and self-contained community bound us together in a close relationship such as can seldom be the case in less remote surroundings'.⁴¹ All three test

³⁴ Rodney, Legg, Tyneham, (Dorset Publishing, 2002), p. 114.

³⁵ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p. 186.

³⁶ Ibid. p.186.

³⁷ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p. 60.

³⁸ Gordon, Lewis, *Imber Then & Now: Revised Edition* (Independently Published, 2021), p. 43.

³⁹ Lilian, Bond, Tyneham: A Lost Heritage. (Friary Press, 1968), p. Introduction

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 91.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.104.

cases exhibit a strong sense of community, making this a good data point for comparative analysis.

Findings

The research has identified a strong correlation between Epynt, Imber and Tyneham across most of the examined data points. These shared characteristics, of ancient heritage; places of worship; village schools; public houses; social life and sense of community, are sufficiently similar to validate the selection of the three test cases and to form the empirical baseline against which the clearance logistics and post-war cultural legacies will be analysed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two – The Logistics of Displacement

– A Comparative Analysis of the Clearance Events

Using the empirical baseline defined in the previous chapter, this chapter will undertake a comparative analysis of several key events associated with the clearance logistics to test the first part of the dissertation hypothesis, that the people of Epynt received very similar treatment in the way in which their removal was managed when compared with like communities in England.

Epynt

In September 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II, the Army undertook an initial survey of Epynt, documenting farm sizes and livestock numbers.⁴² Ronald Davies, in *Epynt Without People*, recounts an army Captain informing his grandfather and other members of the community of the proposal to establish an artillery range on the mountain.⁴³ This was followed by months of silence, leaving people in a state of suspense. Most farmers were tenants, many were unaware that the principal landowners had already engaged in discussions with the War Office; however, no formal communication was shared with the residents. This period of uncertainty mirrored the 'phoney war'—a phase of the conflict characterized by a lack of major military

⁴² Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p.135.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 135.

operations.⁴⁴ Davies asserts that eviction notices were served by Christmas 1939, yet Herbert Hughes contests this timeline, citing a lack of corroborating evidence and noting that the Cilieni School Log Book suggests some final notices may not have arrived until May 1940.⁴⁵ It can be seen from the copy of the requisition letter for Cilfach-yr-haidd farm, dated 4 March 1940, that they were expected to vacate the property by 30 April 1940, a notice period of 57 days.⁴⁶ However, two extensions were granted for the lambing season and the last date for the community's removal was fixed for 30 June 1940.⁴⁷

There is a lack of clarity surrounding illegibility for, and amounts of, compensation paid to those evicted. Mrs Edna Williams wrote a letter to the *Western Mail* in 1993 in which she stated that her father was a tenant and shepherd on Epynt and when he was evicted in 1940 he received three months' notice to quit but he did not receive any financial compensation as he was a tenant, not a landowner.⁴⁸ Hughes however, writes that there was a discussion between the farmers and the government regarding compensation for 'tenant right valuations' for various items e.g. sowing that had already taken place, fencing etc., and provides some example figures.⁴⁹ Hughes also includes a copy of a settlement offer to the Owner-Occupier of Gilfachyrhaidd, which includes the freehold of the farm.⁵⁰ Research has been unable to identify any offers of support to the evicted families outside of the above-described compensation.

For the farming community the clearance meant they faced losing both their homes and their livelihoods. Confronted with this situation some of the farmers protested, saying they would not vacate their farms.⁵¹ Initially, there was very little support for the families, and their plight received little coverage in local or national press.⁵² This changed dramatically when the Committee for the Defence of Welsh Culture (CDWC) took up the cause, immediately requesting a meeting with the Prime Minister to review the situation.⁵³

⁴⁴ William Safire, *Safire's Political Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), pp. 539-530.

⁴⁵ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p.135.,

Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p 86.

⁴⁶ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p 92.

⁴⁷ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, p.136.

⁴⁸ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.118.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. Appendix B.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.93.

⁵² Ibid. p. 94.

⁵³ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 172.

The Welsh Parliamentary Party (later to become Plaid Cymru) also very quickly pledged their support, resulting in the launch of a strong campaign to lobby the government.⁵⁴ The campaign was grounded in a cultural and nationalist approach which may have been more about advancing the nationalists own cause than representing the farmers.⁵⁵ At the same time, the National Union of Farmers was advising the farmers to leave without protest, offering to support the farmers to receive the best possible compensation and assist them with relocation.⁵⁶ When Hitler invaded Norway on 9 April 1940, the fate of Epynt was decided and the Government would listen to no further appeals.⁵⁷ Removal and disposal of livestock had already started in December 1939 and by June 1940 over 200 cattle and 1,000 sheep had been sold.⁵⁸ The livestock count would have been much higher had the farmers had not been able to secure new farms at very short notice. In total, 219 people from 54 were removed from Epynt, with many farmers believing that they would be able to return after the war ended.⁵⁹ According to Ronald Davies, who noted the relocation of each family, a lot of the displaced households were able to remain in Breconshire, the remainder moving to neighbouring Carmarthenshire and Radnorshire.⁶⁰ In the final months, Iorwerth Peate, founder of the Welsh Folk Museum (now the Museum of Welsh Life), visited Epynt in his official capacity.⁶¹ He was tasked with photographing and recording the farms and outbuildings before they met their fate at the hands of the Army.⁶² On his last visit he met an elderly lady, sat looking towards the mountain, her face wet with tears, she asked him where he came from and when he replied, Cardiff, she told him to 'go back there as soon as you can, it is the end of the world here'.⁶³

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.173.

⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 172-176.

⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 172-176.

⁵⁷ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p 107.

⁵⁸ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, pp.136-127.

⁵⁹ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p. 88.

⁶⁰ Davies, *Epynt Without People*, pp.137-146.

⁶¹ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, pp. 110-111.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 110-111.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 111.

Imber

Even before the outbreak of WW II, the inhabitants of Imber lived in close proximity to the Army. Located in a secluded valley, Imber was surrounded by the Salisbury Plain Training Area, in use by the Army since 1872 and expanded in 1940 when the Army purchased additional land including all of Imber Village, with the exception of the Church, the Chapel, the school and the pub.⁶⁴ Initially, the villagers were allowed to remain in their homes as tenants, with a 1,000 yard (914 m) safety perimeter encircling the village.⁶⁵ However, by 1943, with war raging, military usage of the area had changed, and the safety of the villagers could no longer be guaranteed.⁶⁶ On 1 November 1943, the Army organized a meeting in the school room to inform the residents that the village was needed for army training, and they would receive 47 days' notice to quit their homes.⁶⁷ As tenants of the Army, the people had no choice but to accept their fate which, according to Rex Sawyer in his book, *Little Imber on The Down*, they did so reluctantly but without resentment.⁶⁸ A copy of an eviction letter reproduced in Sawyer's book confirms 17 December 1943 as the date by which the tenants must vacate their homes.⁶⁹ The letter stated that residents were expected to manage their own alternative accommodation, find new jobs if required, and make their own removal arrangements.⁷⁰ To cover the cost of moving, the letter offered, 'without prejudice', to reimburse the villagers for reasonable moving expenses or to pay for furniture storage if they could not find a somewhere to else to live.⁷¹ The compensation offered in the letter was limited to covering the cost of any garden produce that could not be harvested prior to the eviction date.⁷²

⁶⁴ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p41.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.93.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.96.

⁶⁷ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p87.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 98.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 158.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.158.

⁷¹ Ibid. p.158.

⁷² Ibid. p. 158.

However, Sawyer suggests that some further level of compensation was paid, he states that, '... most preferred to make their own arrangements with the financial aid allotted to them'.⁷³

The majority of those evicted lived in houses or cottages, but there were also several farms who were forced to hastily dispose of their livestock at clearance sales.⁷⁴ By mid-December 1943, more than 5,000 sheep and 70 dairy cattle had been sold.⁷⁵ The timing of these sales, occurring after the annual sheep fair, resulted in significant financial losses for the farmers.⁷⁶ There are no records of any organized protests during the 47-day notice period.

The lack of protest may be attributed to the widespread belief that residents would be allowed to return once the war was over. This is evidenced in the copy of the eviction letter in Sawyer's book which says, '... until you can find another house, or until the Imber area is again open for occupation, whichever is the earlier.'⁷⁷ Whether the letter is genuine or not, there was a widespread belief amongst the evictees that verbal assurances had been made and they would return.⁷⁸

By 17 December 1943 the village was deserted, its previously close-knit population of approximately 135 people, dispersed to whatever accommodation they could find at such short notice.⁷⁹

Tyneham

Like Imber, Tyneham also had close army neighbours from as early as 1899, with the army adding to their holdings during World War I.⁸⁰ The Bond family had owned the valley and the village, which included their ancestral Elizabethan home, Tyneham House since

⁷³ Ibid. p. 98.

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 101-102.

⁷⁵ Ibid. pp. 101-102.

⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 101-102.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.158.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 106.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 97.

⁸⁰ Lanning, G.E., "'From Rifle Range to Garrison' in Bovington Garrison & the Armour Centre: A History [England, 1970], <<https://archive.org/details/bovingtongarrison/page/n3/mode/2up>> [accessed May 14, 2026]., Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*. p.134.

1683.⁸¹ In late summer 1943 the entire Tyneham valley was being utilised by the Army for D-Day preparation.⁸² On 16 November 1943, eviction notices were posted to residents, instructing them to quit their homes by 19 December 1943, a period of 33 days.⁸³ Many of the residents were tenants of the Bond family and, as such, were offered very little in the way of compensation, just a small amount to cover the value of the vegetables in their gardens.⁸⁴ In Wrights book '*The Village That Died for England*', he appears to quote from the eviction letter when he says. '...and everything possible will be done to help you, both by payment of compensation, and by finding other accommodation for you if you are unable to do so yourself'.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, Wright does not cite a reference for this quote, therefore the offer of compensation can't be validated. The process of finding suitable alternative accommodation at such short notice and under war-time conditions was fraught with difficulty as the local area already housed large numbers of military personnel.⁸⁶ A news embargo prohibited reporting on the evictions, due to the sensitive nature of the D-Day training, a situation which hindered the search for alternative housing and also notifying the public of the livestock dispersal sales.⁸⁷ In his book, *Tyneham*, Legg records the sale at auction on 2 December 1943, of 313 cattle, 9 farm horses, along with sheep, pigs, poultry and 700 lots of farm equipment.⁸⁸ Despite the news embargo, the Auctioneers referred to this as a 'Special' sale and called on all farmers in the wider area to attend and support as much as possible.⁸⁹ The same press restrictions may have suppressed any thought of protest or opposition to the evictions. The eviction letter is said to have contained the following statement:

The government appreciate that this is no small sacrifice which you are asked to help make, but they are sure you will give this further help towards winning the war with a good heart.⁹⁰

⁸¹ Legg, *Tyneham*, p. 125.

⁸² Ibid. p. 117.

⁸³ Patrick, Wright, *The Village That Died for England*, (Faber & Faber, 1995), pp. 245-246.

⁸⁴ Robert, Westwood, *The Tyneham Story*, (Inspiring Places Publishing, 2014), p.20.

⁸⁵ Wright, *The Village That Died for England*, p. 246.

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp.247-248.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 246.

⁸⁸ Legg, *Tyneham*, p. 120.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 120.

⁹⁰ Wright, *The Village That Died for England*, p. 246.

In his book, Wright states that ‘225 people from 102 properties, including 5 farms and 11 smallholdings were evicted’.⁹¹ He cites his source for these figures as *The Times Newspaper*, dated 24 September 1943.⁹² Whilst this agrees with the detailed list provided by Legg, it raises an unanswered question as to when, if at all, the reporting embargo started.⁹³ When the villagers left their homes for the final time on 19 December 1943, they did so under the impression that they would return when hostilities ceased. Legg states that the eviction letter contained the following:

This means that when the War Department has no further use for the property and it is handed back, you have every right to return to the property. It should not be assumed by you that, because the War Department has turned you out, you lose your right of occupying the premises again.⁹⁴

And Wright asserts that the same message was conveyed to residents by a War Department Land Agent.⁹⁵ Both authors have omitted to cite a reference for this key information, and it is therefore unvalidated. However, there must have been some general belief or assumption on the part of the villagers that they would be allowed to return as Mrs Evelyn Bond, of Tyneham House, pinned the following notice to the church door:

Please treat the church and houses with care. We have given up our homes, where many of us have lived for generation. To help win the war to keep men free. We shall return one day and thank you for treating the village kindly.⁹⁶

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis of the removal logistics demonstrates close similarities between the treatment received by the people of Epynt and that of the English communities of Imber and Tyneham. This can be clearly seen in 3 key areas:

⁹¹ Wright, *The Village That Died for England*, p. 245.

⁹² Ibid. p. 245.

⁹³ Legg, *Tyneham*, p. 120.

⁹⁴ Ibid. pp. 118-120.

⁹⁵ Wright, *The Village That Died for England*, p. 246.

⁹⁶ Legg, *Tyneham*, p. 121.

Notice Period: All three communities were served with similar short notice periods. At Epynt this was originally a 57-day period (latter extended by 2 months to allow for lambing); Imber was a 47-day period and Tyneham was 33-day period.

Relocation Burden: In all three cases the War Office placed the primary responsibility for finding alternative housing and arranging removals directly on the families.

Disposal of Livestock: In all three cases, farmers were forced to dispose of livestock. The Epynt farmers did so during the period December 1939 – June 1940 and Tyneham farmers were forced to dispose of their livestock in a much shorter timescale.

In addition, although less tangible, is the common belief held by all three communities that they would be allowed to return at the end of hostilities.

In summary, the comparative analysis has shown that the people of Epynt received very similar treatment in the way in which their removal was managed when compared with similar communities in England.

Chapter Three – The Post-War Legacy

– A Comparative Analysis of Cultural Memory and its Representation

This chapter will undertake a comparative analysis of the post-war narratives and cultural legacies, comparing how the removals have been portrayed and remembered since 1945. This will test the second part of the dissertation hypothesis, that the people of Epynt received less favourable treatment post-clearance than their English contemporaries.

Despite the environments associated with all three test cases having remained in Army ownership and continuous military usage since the WWII evictions, the memory of each displaced community and the landscapes they left behind is distinctive in its own unique way. These areas are now part of the Defence Training Estate (DTE), consisting of over 240,000 hectares globally that is managed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ministry of Defence, “Public Access to Military Areas,” GOV.UK, October 19, 2022 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-access-to-military-areas>> [accessed May 17, 2026].

Epynt

Return

There is no evidence that the Army made any verbal or written pledges to the people of Epynt regarding their return after the end of hostilities. However, that idea persists, being passed from generation to generation, fuelling a continuing sense of betrayal.⁹⁸

Evidence suggests the Army intended, from the outset, to make their presence permanent as evidenced by the deliberate demolition of Thomas Morgan's home to stop him returning after he vacated the farm.⁹⁹ Also, the War Office's stated intent for Epynt was for it to be, 'to be blasted into a wilderness'.¹⁰⁰ Although there was no formal post-evacuation campaign for the community's return, various modern groups (including Cymdeithas y Cymod, Heddwch ar Waith, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Wales have) have recently called for the Army to relinquish the land, questioning the ethics of continuous occupation.

Access

The Nugent Committee, (officially the Defence Lands Committee) delivered its report in 1973 detailing the Armed Forces' long-term land requirements. The committee's work significantly shaped the management of Defence land conservation and the provision for increased public access.¹⁰¹ For Epynt, this resulted in the creation of the Epynt Way, a 65 km permissive bridlepath open to walkers, equestrians and mountain bikers that opened in 2005. The route is located inside the Sennybridge Training Area, close to the boundary. Access to the rest of Epynt is strictly prohibited, except for a public B-road which crosses the mountain passing the Epynt Way Visitor's Centre, originally called Disgwylfa, one of the very few farmhouses that survive.¹⁰² The visitor's centre is the only building that can be visited by the public.

⁹⁸ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, 85th Anniversary Memorial Event, Epynt, 15 June 2025.

⁹⁹ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, 85th Anniversary Tour of Epynt, 22 June 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 182.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. pp. 54-58.

¹⁰² "Visitor Centre — the Epynt Way Association," The Epynt Way Association, n.d. <<https://www.epyntway.org/visitors-centre>> [accessed May 18, 2026].



FIG.2. Gardiner, formally Disgwylfa, now the Epynt Visitors Centre, Epynt, 2025.

Places of Worship

Babell Chapel is the only religious structure acquired by the Army in 1940 and was deconsecrated in June of that year.¹⁰³ The author visited in August 2025 during events marking the 85th anniversary of the clearance, allowing for primary data collection (P.I.O.) for this dissertation. The chapel building had been demolished, only the floor remains alongside which is the small graveyard. The sense of isolation and silence are in stark contrast to its historically role as a vital social and spiritual focal point for the pre-clearance community. Its location within the training area means it is subject to strict access restrictions, making it difficult for descendants to visit family graves. Two burials are believed to have taken place since the 1940 clearance.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, 85th Anniversary Tour of Epynt, 22 June 2025.

¹⁰⁴ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, 85th Anniversary Memorial Tour, Babell Chapel, Epynt, 22 June 2025.



FIG. 3. Beacon Studio, Capel y Babel, Epynt, 1960.

Representation

The collective identity of the displaced Epynt community was fundamentally defined by the anti-clearance protests of 1940, with vociferous nationalist campaigners basing their argument on the cultural significance of the rural Welsh-speaking population. This original narrative persists, making the name Epynt synonymous with the death of a Welsh-speaking culture. A semantic split exists in the local community; Epynt refers to the history, culture and natural environment, while ‘SENTA’ or ‘army camp’ is reserved for the physical training area and military presence.¹⁰⁵ However, the recent creation of the Epynt Way has introduced a new narrative, placing emphasis on military stewardship and recreational access, slowly replacing the historical contrasting narratives of a lost community and a mock theatre of war.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, 85th Anniversary Memorial Event, Epynt, 15 June 2025.

¹⁰⁶ “The Epynt Way Association,” The Epynt Way Association, n.d. <<https://www.epyntway.org/>> [accessed May 21, 2026].

Language

The impact on a national language and culture is an aspect of the removals unique to Epynt, one which is so fundamental and intrinsically linked to the displaced community that it must be included in the comparative analysis.

The people of Epynt were almost exclusively first-language Welsh speakers, using the language for daily life, worship and cultural gatherings. Accounts describe the Welsh of Epynt as being a pure form of Welsh that was spoken with a Brecon dialect.¹⁰⁷

In 1940, Iorwerth Peate described the clearances as, ‘...heartbreaking to see a complete Welsh-Speaking community (one of the few in Brecknockshire) uprooted in this way’.¹⁰⁸ This was echoed in the 1947 nationalist pamphlet, *Havoc in Wales*, in which it claimed that the military acquisition had, ‘... driven the border of Welsh-speaking Wales back ten miles towards Llanwrtyd, where the position is more than precarious’, concluding that, ‘...When the War Office went to Epynt a part of Wales died’.¹⁰⁹

In addition, the militarisation of the mountain instigated a rapid process of Anglicization, as evidenced in the naming of the new infrastructure created by the Army (e.g. Burma Road, Gun Park Road, Concrete Road), together with an influx of monoglot English speakers to the area.¹¹⁰

Imber

Return

Unlike the Epynt community, the residents of Imber offered no protest when evicted in 1943. Immediately following the war, inquiries regarding return were made which met with official silence. By 1947, damage from military firing, exposure to the elements, vandalism and the post-war scavenging for building materials had rendered their homes

¹⁰⁷ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, 85th Anniversary Memorial Event, Epynt, 15 June 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Iorwerth Peate to Twiston Davies, letter written during his visit to Epynt, 25 June 1940, F2024.69 <[Collections Online | Museum Wales](#)> [accessed 15 May 2026].

¹⁰⁹ Gwynfor, Evans, and Plaid Cymru, *Havoc in Wales: The War Office Demands*, (Unknown Publisher, 1947), p.12.

¹¹⁰ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, pp. 180-181.

uninhabitable.¹¹¹ At which point there was a growing realisation that, as one former resident commented, ‘They (the army) never meant to give it back to us’.¹¹² This prompted the War Office to issue a statement in 1948, denying any prior pledge, framing it as a possibility only,¹¹³ Public access to the village was severely restricted until the mid-fifties when controlled group visits and annual services at St Giles’ Church gave the villagers a temporary hope of return.¹¹⁴

The key turning point occurred in 1960 with the expiration of the 1939 Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), which removed the Army’s unilateral authority to control the land.¹¹⁵ This resulted in an attempt by the military to permanently close public rights of way.¹¹⁶ The ensuing Imber protest rallies of 1961, saw a gathering of over 2,000 well organised people seeking to retain the public rights of way and to re-establish the village as a civil and ecclesiastical parish.¹¹⁷ Although a Ministry of Transport inquiry ultimately upheld the Army’s position in 1962, public pressure forced two important concessions; public road access for up to 50 days annually and the establishment of a perimeter path around the danger area. In 1973 the Nugent Committee recommended that the village remain closed to the public and in 1991, the Parish of Imber was abolished, finally ending decades of hope and protest.



FIG. 4. Imber Village, “View from the Downs”, display board, FIG. 5. Gardiner, Nag’s Head Cottages, Imber Village, 2026.

Imber, Viewed 11 April 2026.

¹¹¹ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, pp. 114-115.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 108.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 111.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 113-114.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 117.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 119.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 131.

Access

Access to Imber remains severely restricted to a limited number of days per year, typically coinciding with major public holidays.¹¹⁸ The author was able to visit during Easter 2026 as part of the research for this dissertation. On open days, public entry is permitted to the village via Salisbury Plain, allowing visitor to see the small number of the original buildings that remain, plus modern additions built by the army for military training purposes.¹¹⁹

The main point of interest for visitors is St Giles Church and its surrounding churchyard which are accessible to the public. Inside the church Friends of Imber Church, a volunteer organisation, maintain display boards on which is told the history of Imber, including the evictions.¹²⁰ The highlight of the Imber calendar is Imberbus Day, a very popular charitable event held annually since 2009, that uses 30 Routemaster buses to transport visitors from the local town of Warminster to Imber and other points on Salisbury Plain.¹²¹ This event attracts large numbers of people without any familial connection to the village, effectively transforming the site into a key tourist attraction for one day a year.



FIG. 6. Imberbus.org, Imberbus Day, Imber, 2024.

The Imber Range Perimeter Path offers a 30 mile (48 km) mixed terrain route for waling, mountain biking and horse riding, it has a permissive status.¹²² The current opportunities

¹¹⁸ “St Giles Church”, n. d. <<https://www.imberchurch.org.uk/services.html>> [accessed May 16, 2026].

¹¹⁹ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, Field Trip, Imber Village, 11 April 2026.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ “Imberbus,” Imberbus, n.d. <<https://imberbus.org/>> [accessed May 21, 2026].

¹²² Ministry of Defence, “Salisbury Plain (Imber Range Perimeter Path),” *GOV.UK*, August 1, 2009 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/salisbury-plain-imber-range-perimeter-path>> [accessed May 21, 2026].

for the public interaction with the village and the wider natural landscape, are directly attributable to the concessions granted by the War Office in 1962.

Places of Worship

Following the 1943 evictions, St Giles' Church suffered from military damage despite steps being taken to protect it from stray shells and vandals.¹²³

Today, the church, though deconsecrated, is owned by the Diocese of Salisbury and maintained by The Churches Conservation Trust.¹²⁴ It is open for a very limited number of days per year and, while no longer used for regular worship still holds a small number of annual services.¹²⁵ Following an information request from the author, the local Diocese confirmed that those with a legal right to do so may still be buried at St Giles, as evidenced by a 2023 burial.¹²⁶ The Baptist Chapel suffered a worse fate than the church, it was demolished in the late 70s.¹²⁷ Its fenced churchyard remains, accessible on village open days and the last burial has been identified by this research is from 1969.¹²⁸



FIG. 7. Imber Village, "Church St.", display board, Imber, Viewed 11 April 2026. FIG. 8. Gardiner, St Giles Church, Imber Village, 2026.

board, Imber, Viewed 11 April 2026.

¹²³ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p. 108.

¹²⁴ "History of St Giles," n.d. <<https://www.imberchurch.org.uk/about.html>> [accessed May 17, 2026].

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Annette, Gardiner, Letter from Diocese of Salisbury, 28 April 2026,

Karen Gardner and Tess de la Mare, "Abandoned Wiltshire Village Holds 'Last-Ever Funeral,'" BBC News, January 5, 2023

¹²⁷ Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down*, p. 112 & 153.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 114.

Representation

Imber village is still used for military training and is an incongruous mix of ruined building and new military constructions and there are no permanent displays to greet visitors only some temporary information sheets. The army does not appear to make any special effort to welcome its occasional visitors, instead, by allowing access the army can satisfy a long-standing public mandate rather than actively engaging with the site's heritage. In contrast to the outdoor spaces, the church, manned by volunteers, actively promotes the history of the village using display boards. While Tyneham has become a carefully managed 'destination', Imber has not; this arrangement highlights the transient nature of public access, sending the message that Imber is primarily a military zone.

Language

There are no special linguistic or cultural aspects recorded for the Imber community, outside of the social structure mentioned in the previous chapter.

Tyneham

Return

Like the Imber community, the residents of Tyneham offered no opposition to their 1943 evictions. By 1958, with the Army still in residence and showing no interest in maintaining the village, the interior of historic Tyneham House was found to be beyond repair, despite having an ancient monument status it was demolished in 1967.¹²⁹ In 1968 Rodney Legg formed the Tyneham Action Group with his personal vision that Tyneham pass to National Trust guardianship.¹³⁰ The activists' hopes were raised in 1973 when the Nugent Committee recommended that Tyneham be released from Army ownership, but this was rejected the following year by a government white paper.¹³¹ At this point the Tyneham

¹²⁹ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 141., Tyneham Action Group, *The Fight for Tyneham on the Dorset Coastal Army Ranges* (Dorset Publishing Company, 1969), p.10.

¹³⁰ Westwood, *The Tyneham Story*, pp. 25-26.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* pp.25-26.

Action Group ceased its operations and disbanded.¹³² In February 1975 the Army announced plans to improve public access to the ranges and in 1978 began to develop access to the village, making the buildings safe in preparation for opening to the public in the following year.¹³³



FIG. 9. Tyneham Village, "The Row", Information Board, Tyneham, Viewed 11 April 2026.



FIG. 10. Gardiner, "The Row", Tyneham Village, 2026.

Access

Tyneham village presents as a collection of managed ruins, deliberately preserved to convey a sense of its history. None of the remaining houses are complete, but the area still maintains the feel of a small rural village. The school has been restored and is set out as it would have been when it closed in 1932. Additional visitor information is also on display in the church. The site attracts a broad spectrum of visitors, from families enjoying a day out to historical and environmental researchers. Geographically isolated in a deep valley, it feels divorced from the surrounding military environment.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid. pp.25-26.

¹³³ Ibid. pp.25-26.

¹³⁴ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, Field Trip, Tyneham Village, 11 April 2026.



FIG. 11 Gardiner, Tyneham Village School, 2026.

The Lulworth Range Walk is a circular walk of 3.7 miles (6 km), a permissive route within the Army owned Lulworth Ranges, in which Tyneham is located, allowing public access to the Dorset coastline and natural environment. These walks are typically open in conjunction with Tyneham village open access days.¹³⁵

Places of Worship

St Mary's church fared better than Tyneham House in the post-evacuation years. Westward records the stained glass was removed, the windows boarded for safety and the building surrounded by barbed wire to deter vandals.¹³⁶ The church remained like this until restoration work in the late 1970s.¹³⁷ Today, although deconsecrated, the church is owned by the Diocese of Salisbury and maintained by the Ministry of Defence.¹³⁸ It is open to the public on the days that Tyneham village is accessible and has taken on a new role, a mix of visitor's centre and museum.¹³⁹ The author was able to visit in April 2026 as part of the research for this dissertation. Whilst the church is no longer used for worship, the churchyard showed signs of recent burials.¹⁴⁰ As at Imber, those with a legal right may still be buried in the churchyard.

¹³⁵ Defence Infrastructure Organisation, "Lulworth Range Walks and Tyneham Village Access Times 2025," GOV.UK, June 26, 2024 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lulworth-access-times/lulworth-range-walks-and-tyneham-village-access-times-2025>> [accessed May 21, 2026].

¹³⁶ Westwood, *The Tyneham Story*, p. 28.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 28.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 29.

¹³⁹ Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, Field Trip, Tyneham Village, 11 April 2026.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Representation

Descriptions of the Tyneham community at the time of the evictions focus on the inhabitants, predominantly ordinary people, long-term tenants living in a rural community that had remained largely unchanged since the previous century. However, the contemporary portrayal of Tyneham has undergone a fundamental shift, from a community defined by its people to a managed location 'frozen in time'. The village has been transformed from what was once a living community to an outdoor museum, complete with car park and toilets.¹⁴¹ While the former residents are memorialized on display boards, their lives are reduced a few lines of text, only the accompanying photographs bringing their stories to life.¹⁴²

Language

Lilian Bond in her memoirs mentions a Dorset dialect being spoken in Tyneham.¹⁴³ However, this is the only place this is mentioned and research has not confirmed that the dialect still existed at the time of the evictions. Nor has any concern been found regarding the potential impact of the community's dispersal on its preservation. The linguistic or cultural cost does not appear to have been a consideration during the Tyneham evictions.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis of the post-war legacy demonstrates notable differences in the cultural and material representations of Epynt compared to Imber and Tyneham, with Epynt receiving less favourable treatment.

The Pledge of Return: Epynt stands alone in having no evidence of the Army promising that they would be able to return, with the Army actively demolishing homes, like Thomas Morgan's, to prevent repatriation. In contrast, residents of both Imber and Tyneham were sustained by a strong, albeit later contested, conviction that their displacement was temporary.

¹⁴¹ Dudley, *An Environmental History of the UK Defence Estate*, p. 25.

¹⁴² Annette, Gardiner, Personal Informal Observation, Field Trip, Tyneham Village, 11 April 2026.

¹⁴³ Lilian, Bond, *Tyneham: A Lost Heritage*. (Friary Press, 1968), pp. 118-120.

Public Access: Imber benefits from Open Days and popular events like Imberbus Day and Tyneham has been transformed into a preserved ‘outdoor museum’ for the public. In contrast, Epynt remains largely a prohibited military zone, with access restricted to the peripheral Epynt Way and associated Visitors’ centre.

Religious Structures: The physical exclusion extends to the religious structures of the communities. While St Giles in Imber and St Mary’s in Tyneham have been preserved, restored and remain available for family burials, Epynt’s Babel Chapel was demolished, leaving only a footprint and a graveyard that is difficult for descendants to visit.

The portrayal of the legacy: The portrayal of these sites also differs significantly, Tyneham is a carefully managed heritage destination and Imber satisfies a public mandate for access, whilst Epynt is defined by a semantic split between its lost culture and the SENTA military presence.

Linguistic and Cultural: This is unique to Epynt, Unlike the English villages, the evictions at Epynt resulted in the destruction of a pure Welsh-speaking community and the area very quickly subjected to a process of Anglicization. This represents a profound national loss that was not a factor in the management of the Salisbury Plain or Lulworth Estates.

In summary, the comparative analysis has shown that the Epynt community receives less favourable treatment in its post-war legacy, as demonstrated by the differences in its cultural and material representation when compared to similar communities in England.

Chapter Four – The National Metric

- Epynt, Tryweryn and the Argument for National Importance

Introduction

This chapter will undertake a comparative analysis of the Epynt clearance with the flooding of Tryweryn, two events that resulted in the displacement of rural Welsh-

speaking communities, to test the final part of the hypothesis, that the Epynt clearance should be reframed as an event of National importance.

Historical Parallels

The flooding of the Tryweryn valley, Merionethshire, in 1965 and the subsequent drowning of the village of Capel Celyn represents a seminal moment in Welsh history. The clearance was instigated by Liverpool City Corporation to satisfy the increasing demands of the city for clean water which were a direct result of post-war expansion and slum clearance.¹⁴⁴ Capel Celyn was a close-knit, entirely Welsh-speaking community, one of the last in the area.¹⁴⁵ The creation of the reservoir destroyed twelve homes plus the school, Post Office, chapel, graveyard, displacing forty-eight residents.¹⁴⁶ This resulted in a decade of political battle and a campaign of direct action, becoming a watershed moment that profoundly influenced the course of Welsh politics and nationalism.¹⁴⁷

There are clear parallels between the events at Tryweryn and Epynt even though they occurred decades apart. In both cases they were cohesive communities where the Welsh language and culture were central to daily life.¹⁴⁸ The clearances resulted in the death of these linguistic strongholds. Also, in both Tryweryn and Epynt the land was requisitioned and the inhabitants evicted to serve non-local, external interests: Epynt for a military training area for the War Office, and Tryweryn for a reservoir to supply water to Liverpool City Corporation.¹⁴⁹ Both events were adopted by Welsh nationalists, who framed the actions as the 'theft of Welsh land by external government or industry, linking the specific events to a broader narrative of land rights and the defence of Welsh national identity.

¹⁴⁴ Episode 1: Drowned (Podcast) (London: BBC Sounds, 2023). <
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/p0f245q6> > [3 March 2026].

¹⁴⁵ Wyn Thomas, *Tryweryn A New Dawn?* (Talybont: Y Lolfa Cyf, 2023), p50.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Einion, *Capel Celyn, Ten Years of Destruction: 1955–1965* (Cyhoeddiadau Barddas and Gwynedd Council, 2007)

¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁸ Richard King, *Brittle with Relics: A History of Wales, 1962–97* (Faber & Faber, 2022). P.59., Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, p.60.

¹⁴⁹ Hughes, *An Uprooted Community*, pp.88-89., Thomas, *Tryweryn A New Dawn?*, pp. 28-32.

Historical Approach and Points of Comparison

Foundation for Comparison

This comparative analysis is structured around three key areas to determine the relative ‘national importance’ of the two events:

The Primary Context

Tryweryn’s flooding was a politically charged, highly symbolic conflict, that centred on Welsh autonomy and legislative control, often characterised as a battle based on hydropolitics. Whilst the Epynt clearance was initially framed by the overriding demands of wartime sacrifice, it was also promoted as an issue of nationalism, where the core values of ‘Welshness’ had been attacked.

The Mechanics of Trauma

Both events caused immediate linguistic and cultural loss, in the case of Tryweryn, the emotive word ‘drowning’ is applied to describe what happened and for Epynt, the word ‘death’ is used to describe the fate of the community. In each case there was powerful political resistance, in the case of Tryweryn this resulted in a decade of direct action and profoundly influenced Welsh political consciousness. For Epynt, the evictions created a vacuum in which Anglicization was able to thrive, actively supported, albeit in a state of ignorance, by the Army.

Legacy and Commemoration

Tryweryn is acknowledged as an event of national importance existing in the national memory and epitomized by the motto ‘Cofich Dryweryn’ (Remember Tryweryn). In contrast, Epynt remains relatively unknown and academically under-studied, with little formal memorialisation but a persistent, local memory of betrayal. The comparisons will contrast the enduring visibility of both events in the national consciousness.

Defining the National Metric

Defining Events of National Importance

Whilst researching this topic the author has been unable to identify a universally accepted definition of ‘an event of national importance’, in a historical context. It would

also suggest that events are designated as being of national importance through a process of interpretation. To be able to apply a degree of rigor to the comparative analysis, the following metrics will be used.

- Political and legislative legacy (e.g., subsequent policy changes)
- Enduring cultural memory and formal memorialization
- The extent of long-term linguistic and demographic change

Comparative Analysis: Linguistic, Political and Cultural Legacy

The Nature of Linguistic and Community Erasure

The clearance at Epynt resulted in complete dispersal of a Welsh-speaking community who also suffered a double blow by being forced to prioritise their relocation needs over the cultural and linguistic norms. Not only was there an immediate loss of their familial proximity there was also the loss of friendship groups breaking the bonds of a close community that was proud of the way it supported its members. Further further follow-up study would be required to see what cultural and linguistic impact there was on the individuals and their descendants to ascertain the overall impact of the clearance on Welsh language and culture. What is certain is that, as previously stated, the Army lacked any sensitivity for the areas long linguistic when they embarked upon a 'English-only' naming convention for their new developments on Epynt (e.g. the roads they constructed). The fact that it was war time subdued the political and nationalistic campaign to save Epynt but it did not silence as there was a recognition that once the Epynt community had gone it would never be replaced. Even if the families had been allowed to return at the end of the war, it would have been impossible for the community just pick-up where they left off.

Trewern, whilst fundamentally having the same end result as the Epynt clearance, had some fundamental differences. The battle was always based on the struggle for Welsh autonomy and legislative control. It highlighted fact that Wales was not seen as a nation and therefore its natural resources were unquestionably available to be shared with its neighbours. Politically, Wales was also a very different place by the sixties with protest and freedom of speech being more comfortable for a lot of people. There were also those,

like Saunders Lewis who called for direct action when extended campaigning failed to bring success.

Both communities ultimately suffered the same fate and the path by which they arrived at their fate is somewhat secondary. External forces had destroyed their environment, a situation from which there was no return and with the consequential damage that caused to Welsh language and culture.

Representation, Protest and Memorialisation

At Epynt, the narrative was one of land 'theft' with parallels made between the historical displacement of the Welsh people by the English, pushing them westwards and then trying to remove them from the ancestral home. Much was made at the time of the relationship between rural landscape and Welshness, as though identity was interwoven with nature. The nationalistic argument could only be taken so far, but there some political activists did publicly draw parallels between the Epynt clearance and the German invasion of Poland. For those with more conservative outlooks, this was too much. A lot of people were conflicted, they didn't want to be unpatriotic, and the British Army was full of Welsh people, their people, fighting alongside the English, all with the same objective. Epynt is synonymous with the clearance, with a people who would never return because the Army never planned for them to return. Their community died and with it a further enclave of Welsh heritage. To a certain degree, they were victims of circumstances, if events had happened in peacetime there might well have been a different outcome. But as with a lot of historical events, with the passage of time they are re-analysed with a different lens and their significance revisited and reassessed. This is slowly starting to happen with events at Epynt. The narrative is shifting for a community displaced by war to concentrate on the actual loss of language and culture and to understand how this could have been allowed to happen and what, if anything could have been done differently. Just as the clearance did not happen in a vacuum neither did the loss of language and culture. One major reason that Epynt is not yet engrained in the national memory is not because it was an insignificant event, it was certainly as important as Trewern, but simply because it happened during war-time but that does not and should not detract from the significance of the actual event.

For Tryweryn the outcome was the same as for Epynt, an community was lost along with the associated culture and linguist impacts. But the way in which events have been memorialised means they remain in the national memory, very likely because of public awareness at the time. Visual prompts, such as the distinctive 'Cofiwch Dryweryn' mean that people are more likely to have an awareness of the event, even if they don't know or understand the detail. It has come to symbolize a turning point, a 'watershed' for both Welsh politics, Welsh nationalism and Welsh democracy.

Summary

In conclusion, events at Epynt have not resulted in the same political and legislative legacy as did events at Tryweryn. However, there is an enduring cultural memory attached to Epynt along with a formal memorialization that has only just started to grow in the last few decades. Tryweryn garnered a lot of high-profile attention from the outset and Epynt didn't but that speak more to the context in which the clearance took place than to the actual event and as public awareness is increasing, so too is the realisation that this too was an event of National importance.

The results of the comparative analysis prove the final part of the hypothesis, that the Epynt clearance should be reframed as an event of National importance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, using a structure methodology, the comparative analysis has delivered very clear results in all three areas analysed and fully answering the research question. The test cases of Imber and Tyneham were shown to be very closely matched to Epynt in multiple areas increasing the credibility of the outcome. In chapter 2 the data points very clearly showed that, contrary to a persistent narrative, the people of Epynt were treated almost identically to their English counterparts within the wider pattern of military requisitions. Chapter 3 identified differences in which both the narrative and the cultural legacy different between Epynt and the two English sites with the cultural memory of Epynt taking a lesser role than the military narrative. When the same metrics are applied to both Epynt and Trewern in Chapter 4, it was shown that there is a high degree of correlation and that Epynt should therefore be reframed as an event of National importance.

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Appendix A - Record of Site Visits

Details of site visits to military training areas, undertaken by Annette Gardiner as part of the methodology for researching World War II land acquisitions and community displacement.

15 June 2025, **Epynt**

Activities:

- Attended 85th Anniversary Memorial Events at Sennybridge Training Area
- Photographed information boards
- Watch commemorative play
- Listen to commemorative talk
- Informal conversation with Epynt descendants

2 June 2025, **Epynt**

Activities:

- Attended 85th Anniversary Memorial Events at Sennybridge Training Area
- Conducted bus tour of Mynydd Epynt, including restricted area
- Visited Babell Chapel for brief memorial service
- Photographed Babell Chapel
- Listen to tour commentary given by a local historian and Epynt descendant
- Informal conversation with Epynt descendants
- Visited Epynt Way Visitor's centre for unveiling of memorial plaque. Joint military and Graziers' enterprise

11 April 2026, **Tyneham**

Activities:

- Visited Tyneham village, including the recreated village school, St Mary's Church and churchyard
- Photographed the above
- Photographed the information boards
- Photographed wider area, including the ranges

11 April 2026, **Imber**

Activities:

- Visited Imber village, St Giles' Church and churchyard
- Photographed the above
- Photographed the information boards within the church
- View archival material available in the church – mainly photographs
- Purchased book. *Imber Then & Now* by Gordon Lewis – proceeds to Friends of St Giles